University of Alberta

Kente Cloth Weaving among the Asante in Ghana A West African Example of Gender and Role Change Resistance

by

Mari Elizabeth Bergen ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

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The undersigned certify that thay have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Kente Cloth Weaving among the Asante in Ghana: A West African Example of Gender and Role Change Resistance* by Mari Elizabeth Bergen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Textiles and Clothing.

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ABSTRACT

Kente cloth weaving on the narrow-strip West African loom is traditionally a male role among the Asante in Ghana. I conducted formal and informal interviews with residents of all age groups, in Bonwire, to solicit opinion on why or why not women should weave in the village. This research shows that traditional gender role division among the Asante is persistent in weaving despite the fact that the government of Ghana, along with national women's groups and development agencies, both within the country and abroad, have made a concerted effort to encourage women to weave. Older men and younger women believe women should be allowed to weave mainly for reasons of modernity and economics. Younger men and older women are predominantly against it for reasons of tradition and the difficulty of gender relations. Few women with young children can afford to invest their time and capital in long term projects like weaving.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father Jacob M. Bergen (1907 - 1967) and to my sister Agnes E. Zimmerman (1952 - 1996). It is my deepest regret that neither one was able to witness the completion of my formal education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork on which this thesis is based was carried out under the auspices of the Textiles, Clothing and Culture Division of the Human Ecology Department at the University of Alberta for the degree of Master of Arts. I owe much to their generosity, and the freedom they allowed me, in the planning and execution of my research.

I would like to thank the following for their much appreciated funding support: Department of Human Ecology for a research assistant ship; Canadian Home Economics Association for a Global Awareness Bursary; Alberta Museums Association for an Individual Training Grant; Engberg Scholarship in International Home Economics; and, last but not least, my son-in-law, James Curtis for his generous support in supplying the funding for purchasing my field equipment.

During the course of my field research, I incurred obligations to a great many people. I cannot acknowledge more than a few here, but I must record the willing help and friendliness of the people I met in Ghana, and, particularly the people of Kumasi. My greatest field obligation is, of course, to the people of Bonwire. My heartfelt thanks go to all the residents who so graciously gave of their time and opinions. I would like to thank: Acting Chief Twafouhene; Queen Mother Nana Rosina Cobbina; Kentehene Nana Ampem Dankwah II; the former Kentehene Nana Akwasi Gyamfi; and Nana Opanin Oppong for their permission and kind support of my research. Thanks go to Linguist Mr. Peter Badu; kente shop owner Mr. Samuel Cophie for sharing his knowledge of kente cloth with me. Thanks go to the Master Weaver in Bonwire and to Mr Manfred Owusui for sharing their knowledge of traditional religion. A special thanks to Madam Ntoosea, Madam Afrakomaa, and Sister Adwoa for their wise and unique perspectives on gender relations. Thanks also go to Mr. Ralph Solomon for acting as my social advisor and guide; Mr Victor Oppong for his superb job at translating and his enthusiasm for my research project.

If any of the above should read this book, I should like them to know that I am well aware that no foreigner can hope to understand everything about an issue as complicated as the importance of kente to Asante culture in the brief period I spent in their community. I have become aware of some of the issues surrounding gender relations and weaving practice, and if I have communicated this understanding to others, then I have done all that I had hoped to do.

My "support" friends in Kumasi and Accra need special mention. In Kumasi: Mr Kwame (Osei) Adgeay and his wife Theresa who supplied me with my 'lifeline' to Canada,

and could always be counted on for wonderful meals; Mrs. Ama Prempeh of CEDEP who works tirelessly on behalf of Ghanaian women; Mr and Mrs Peter Shinney who supplied me with well worn novels and practical advice; Charles and John at the Basel Mission guest house for their efforts at making my stay there as pleasant as possible. In Accra: Misses Gifty, Sarena, and Zenabou, daughters of Sister Mary Opare - they shared their home, their excellent culinary skills, their bargaining skills, and their laughter with me; in London, Helen and Abraham.

As the work abroad could not have functioned without the support of people at home, I extend an especial heart felt thanks to Laurie Hart and Anne Lambert for "taking care of business" while I was gone. I would also like to thank the other graduate students who shared with me both joys and miseries: Michele; Maria; Anne; Laurie; Irene; Jean. I thank Diana, Suzanne, and Linda for cheering me through the "official forest" and the "technological Jungle". Thank you to my committee members for their patience, and to Nancy Kerr for being a friend.

But most of all I want to thank my family, especially Anna, Jennifer, Morgana, Kevin, James and Lloyd, for understanding why I needed to do this.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Ghana[1] has the feel of a young nation. It is vibrant, dynamic, and a place of contrasts. It is a place where progress and change are constantly butting heads with traditional practice. It is a country in which democracy is still new and evolving, with a government that is desperately trying to pull its people into the twenty-first century on a shoe-string budget. Ghana is a land where people welcome opportunity and change because there must be something better than the status quo, but also try to hold on to tradition because it is what they understand.

When I first arrived in Ghana, I was there to research the implications of Asante women's newly acquired status as weavers and what that meant to the community in Bonwire. I quickly learned that while there were a few Asante women who knew how to weave, there were no women weaving on a full-time basis, and only one on a part-time, somewhat regular basis. I also realised that the question I was asking was the wrong one. While it is true that Asante women, like most West African women, are powerful entrepreneurs, most women had neither complete freedom to choose their occupations nor the means to take up whatever crafts they chose.

Following the time-honoured tradition of field researchers everywhere, who find that conditions and circumstances are quite different than they expected, I changed the focus of my research to accommodate the actual sum and substance of what I found in the field. Early on in my conversations with male weavers I was struck by the strong resistance many of the young and active weavers had against women weaving. Because the reasons given for why women should not weave were so many and varied, I wanted to uncover and examine the underlying reasons that were perhaps not being articulated. And because the focus of my research was largely being shaped by the earlier questions I was asking, it was some time before I realized that there was another question I needed to answer. Despite all the involvement of governmental and non-governmental organizations, even women who had been helped and encouraged to weave might not stay in the craft. Why were women not weaving?

---

[1] For map see Figure 1.1 on page 10.

With the current focus on global community, it is important to document traditional practices and current changes in technology, community attitudes, and personal viewpoints. It is becoming increasingly important to explore non- traditional gender issues in an effort to understand the far-reaching ramifications of global economic decisions at local levels. Research into the lives and experiences of the crafts people and their families, instead of focusing on the craft, could expand our understanding of both the role of the crafts person and the dynamics of gender relations in West Africa.

Ghana, like other West African countries, is still struggling to cope with the aftereffects of colonialism in many fields, particularly in political structure, religion, and education. The increasing importance of the modern cash economy since Independence has further impacted on the traditional social structures of the extended family. However, it is probable that Ghana's huge external debt and the structural adjustment programs which have been imposed on the country have had the most devastating effect of all on the traditional social structures. The extended family system is weakening, women's traditional power bases are eroding, and the relationships between men and women are becoming more difficult.

Women in Ghana are currently experiencing some of the same social and cultural upheavals as North Americans and Europeans experienced in the 1960's and 1970's, but in a climate of ever increasing financial hardship. They are responding to the challenges with innovative, culturally relevant solutions. I was interested in interviewing those women (pathfinders) who have made unorthodox choices. I wanted to hear about their experiences and the changes in their lives, and then how those changes were viewed by others within their culture.

This research documented how traditional gender role division among the Asante is persistent in kente cloth weaving despite the fact that the government of Ghana, along with national women's groups and development agencies, both within the country and abroad, have made a concerted effort to encourage women to become weavers. This study will contribute to ongoing ethnographic documentation of cultural tradition, gender role, technology, and change.

In this chapter I introduce the location of the study with a brief history of the area, the Asante people and an overview of economic conditions in Ghana. In the second chapter

I explain how I went about my research and place it within the methodologies of the social sciences. Research into the actions and interactions, within and between gendered roles in context, demands a holistic approach in the field. Human ecology, the study of humans in interaction with their near and far environments, allows for an investigation with sufficient breadth and depth to examine change in human behaviour.

Chapter three is concerned with introducing some of the people of the study area. In an effort to allow the voices and opinions of the people of Bonwire to be heard in what is, after all, a collaborative work, I use their own narratives, either direct, or in translation throughout this thesis. I have selected portions of their narratives to illustrate the breadth of experience and the variety of opinion represented in the village.

Chapter four deals with the two most significant aspects which affect the success or failure of implementing any change or development of weaving practise in Bonwire, traditional gender role and and the Akan matrilineal kinship system. The kinship system impacts on gender role in such a way that it affects marriage, the raising of children, their education and the maintenance of economic well-being for women and children.

In chapter five, I explore the reasons Ghanaian parents have for the preference of formally educating their sons to the detriment of their daughters. I will also examine the role women play in the work force, and how they are forced to balance self-sufficiency and independence with marital relations.

In chapter six I look at kente weaving, both from an historical perspective and from contemporary practice. This chapter is about weaving as defined by and for men and the devices which are used to exclude women from participating. In chapter seven I review development as it pertains to women's lives in general; and I show both the opposition to and the support for women's involvement in kente weaving.

In chapters eight and nine I discuss my findings within the context of the traditional gender role expectations and the current (1996 - 1997) economic climate. I discuss how these findings relate to the future of kente weaving in Bonwire. I also examine the implications recent events in weaving could have for women in this village. Further, I discuss the impact that my research had and is continuing to have on the weaving industry in Bonwire.

My research has brought me much joy as well as some fairly sizable problems. Africa is a large continent with numerous and diverse cultures. Whereas there are areas of culture which are strikingly similar between peoples, such as gender relations in some West African countries, there are also areas of dissimilarity. Much of what is written about the people of Africa tends to minimize the diversity. While the Asante have not been neglected in academic writing, little of the research is of recent origin. I have relied somewhat heavily on a few writers because their research has been specifically about Ghana (Dolphyne, Oppong), about the Akan (Rattray, Ackah), and about matrilineal kinship systems (Schneider, Fortes).

Furthermore, most of what has been written about the Akan expresses the Akan ideals of behaviour and practice rather than the actual behaviour and practice. It is necessary to know both the ideal and the actual behaviour if one is to understand or even recognize those behaviours which are changing. Because there are these gaps in the literature, I have looked to recent writings about other African cultures as well. Much of the literature pertains to specific culture groups other than the Asante, therefore, if I have seen parallels and similarities where I should have noticed differences, I apologise. The sharing of research in most African countries has been severely handicapped by lack of resources.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AREA

Ghana

Ghana, a former British colony known as the Gold Coast, is home to some seventeen million people in a country less than half the size of Alberta. This democratic republic is divided into regions whose limits tend to loosely correspond to pre-colonial tribal boundaries. Although there are several large cities, more than half the population are rural dwellers. The numerous ethnic groups are generally clustered in small towns and villages near the administrative centres of the various regions. With the exception of Accra, the capital of Ghana, these cities are also considered to be mainly ethnic strongholds. The population is becoming increasingly younger; more than half (53.9%) of all people were under the age of 19 in 1991 (PC Globe, 1992), but by 1997, I heard national reports that the population mean was fifteen.

The economy in Ghana has been beset with problems ever since global commodity prices collapsed in the late 1970's (Stackhouse, 1996). Inflation was almost 25% in 1996, the year of this research, and is running at 19% in 1998 (Ghana Home Page, 1998). This does not, however, reflect the real drop in the cedi against international currencies and the full increase in cost of imported goods. The state of the economy and the crumbling national infrastructure were frequent topics of conversation wherever I travelled. As I was there during an election, I also heard of numerous complaints and accusations of corruption, mishandling of funds, and no small resentment at Western countries for their closed door policies on immigration and work visas. It could be said that most adult Ghanaians spend a great deal of effort trying to better their conditions and in seeking some economic advantage. One young man I met, who at 30 had no prospects of ever marrying under his present economic conditions, even went as far as changing his religion in the hope that he would then be better placed to find suitable employment.

Women in Ghana are known for their high rate of economic activity. A 1985 United Nations survey of 38 developing countries found that Ghana had the highest rate (92%) of women involved in productive activity other than housework (Blanc & Lloyd, 1994). Opportunities for employment can be roughly divided between: professional and government work (greatly dominated by men); the agricultural sector and open market (mostly in the hands of women); and specialized craft production where each craft is generally the prerogative of a single gender[2]. Unemployment affects over 20% of the population (Ghana Home Page, 1998), and is particularly common among teens.

The most poverty stricken women and young men migrate to the larger centres to sell imported goods at the roadside just for "chop" money (daily food). The 1993 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) revealed that under nutrition was the most immediate health problem among infants and children. In rural areas, one third of the children under three suffered from stunting and underweight (Ghana Nutrition, 1993). While I was not aware of anyone actually starving in Ghana, I saw many people who did not have enough to eat. I was told that as many as one third of the population (and predominately women and children) were frequently or seasonally reduced to one meagre meal a day. Rural women and elderly men were often visibly gaunt; small children with the distended bellies of protein deficiency were a common sight in the villages. Even citizens who were considered professionals, and were therefore relatively well off, would "fast" occasionally when their wages had not yet caught up to inflation.

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[2] Men are involved in weaving, wood carving, metal work, barbering, animal husbandry, and driving taxi. Women are potters, agriculturists, hairdressers, and seamstresses.

Education in Ghana is a top priority for all political groups. By 1989, 60% of the total adult population (57% female, 3% men) were still illiterate (Berry, 1995). Nevertheless, access to education, which is compulsory for children between the ages of eight and 14, was tied to the economic circumstances of the parents or guardians. A common complaint of children was that they could not attend school because the parents had not paid the fees. More girls are now attending primary school than in the past, but a gender bias exists in access to higher education. I have been notified that as of December 1997, all education fees (textbook rentals, etc.) below the university and college level were eliminated (pers. com. Rosa, 1997); this should give access to more, but not all, children. Poverty stricken parents may keep children out of school to help in the market or to care for younger siblings.

Ashanti Region

The Asante[3] people, the largest of the Akan groups which comprise 44% of the total population of Ghana, are centred in and around Kumasi (Newton & Else, 1995). They live in what can be termed the heart of Ghana. The Asante are divided into twelve lineages, each with its own "stool"[4] or royal office in the form of a chieftaincy. Each of these is further divided into lesser stools. The succession is not hereditary in the strictest sense of the word. Rather, a Queen Mother will select the new chief from eligible candidates, all from the royal lineage of the stool, put forward by the men's organization (Arhin, 1983; Basehart, 1961; Carpenter & Hughes, 1977).

The present political structure of the Asante nation was born some 300 years ago when eleven chieftaincies consolidated under one chosen "stool"[5] or leadership (Sarpong,

---

[3] The term "Asante", "Ashanti", and "Asanti" have all been used to refer to the people in the literature. My preference is for the first term as this was used by the people prior to colonization. The name of the region is Ashanti, a hold-over from British colonization.

[4] The stool is the physical symbol of the soul of the individual or the lineage, and therefore all the stools of the individuals who lead the lineage, both at present and in the past, are tended to.

[5] The golden stool is the physical symbol of the soul of the Asante nation. "The real unity of Asante states began with the descent of the Golden Stool. Oral tradition has it that when the Golden Stool descended, all the states forming the union collected their black stools, put them together and burnt them to interpret that the spirits of the departed chiefs had all joined together and entered the Golden Stool" (Kwadwo, 1994, p. 81).

1977). The Asantehene (or king) is the spiritual leader and the highest chief of the Asante. The Queen Mother, not a wife or an actual mother to, but usually a close female relative of the Asantehene, is the mother of the Asante nation (Sarpong, 1977; Carpenter & Hughes, 1977). Her roles, principally, are to act as advisor to the Asantehene, to guide people in the proper observance of ritual and taboo, and, in former times, to prepare girls for initiation (Sarpong, 1977). Each of the major lineages has a Queen Mother as well as a chief, sub-chiefs and linguists. Kumasi is the seat of the most powerful of the Asante royal offices, the Asantehene.

In the past, all Akan practiced a form of spirit worship and veneration of the ancestors (traditional religion), which had a central supreme being (Nyame) and a multitude of lesser gods who acted as intermediaries between Nyame and the people (Berry, 1995). Ancestors, who monitor the behaviour of their lineage members, are the link between the living and the spirit world (Kwadwo, 1994). Now however, the Asante practice a wide variety of religions which include Islam[6], and many forms of Christianity as well as the traditional religion.

The Asante are a matrilineal people, that is, biological descent is reckoned through the maternal bloodline while spiritual descent is through the paternal line. Men have a strong financial allegiance to their maternal kin, and a much weaker one to their own children (Dolphyne, 1995). Traditional inheritance follows along biological descent lines; maternal nephews or younger brothers will inherit the office or estate of a deceased male, while daughters inherit from their mothers and grandmothers. Widows do not inherit from their spouses unless special provision has been made. Kumasi, with almost a million[7] people, is a lively, colourful and noisy place. Most dwellings house a large complement of people of all living generations and many extended kin. Men generally do not reside with their wives; children reside with either parents, grandparents or other relatives. People of all ages hawk their wares on the sidewalks; each one trying to eke out a living by developing his or her own economic niche. Women cook and sell meals, young people sell music tapes, used shoes, and clothing. The youngest children sell ice water. Kumasi Central Market, an open market in the centre of Kumasi, is the largest market in Ghana and is rumoured to be the largest in West Africa. Here you can purchase foodstuffs, art and craft items, medicines, household goods and appliances, or have clothing made to order while you wait.

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[6] In the time of the reign of Opoku Ware I (1720-1750), the Asante nation defeated and absorbed several smaller states whose peoples had been converted to Islam. Some of these Islamic students were employed as scribes in the Asantehene's court and thus were in a position to influence others to convert (Kwadwo, 1994).

[7] As the most recent official census figures I found were from 1992 (pop. 385,00), I used the figure most often quoted by local people: "almost a million". Not all residents are reported in the census. A significant portion of the population in Kumasi, on any given day, would not be considered residents even though they might reside semi-permanently in the city.

I was told that the Asante people, as is the case with all Ghanaians, have a strong love for children. Certainly the country has a preponderance of children since half the population is under the age of 15. Population studies indicate that the birthrate in the Asante Region is not only among the highest in Ghana (Oppong, 1987) but also in most of Africa[8].

The city is surrounded by a large rural population and numerous "craft" villages that generally house workers in a single occupation. While weavers reside in other villages and in Kumasi, the majority of weaving and training of weavers occurs in the village of Bonwire.

Bonwire: Home of Kente Weaving

Bonwire is a rural village located about 14 miles from Kumasi (see Figures 1.2, 1.3). I was told by Assemblyman Tawiah that the population is approximately 9,000 people in 400 housing units. Typically, three or four generations from the same matrilineage reside together. The notion of one nuclear family to one house is unknown here. The houses are mostly of the typical mud-brick and plaster with metal roof style. The walls of the house form part of the walls of the family compound. Numerous rooms with doors to the compound are ranged along at least two walls. There are roofed verandahs facing the compound where most of the household activities take place. Some of the houses also have verandahs to the outside; weavers often set up one or two looms here.

There is a sign outside the village which welcomes tourists to: BONWIRE, HOME OF KENTE. The whole economy of Bonwire is focused on kente and subsistence agriculture. The farms are within the forests surrounding the village and women walk to the farms almost every day. There are several weaving sheds, numerous kente shops, two yarn shops, churches, schools, and some drinking establishments near the centre of Bonwire. Women sell some small dry goods, extra produce or meals from their doorsteps or in kiosks. I saw one barber shop and a sewing shop.

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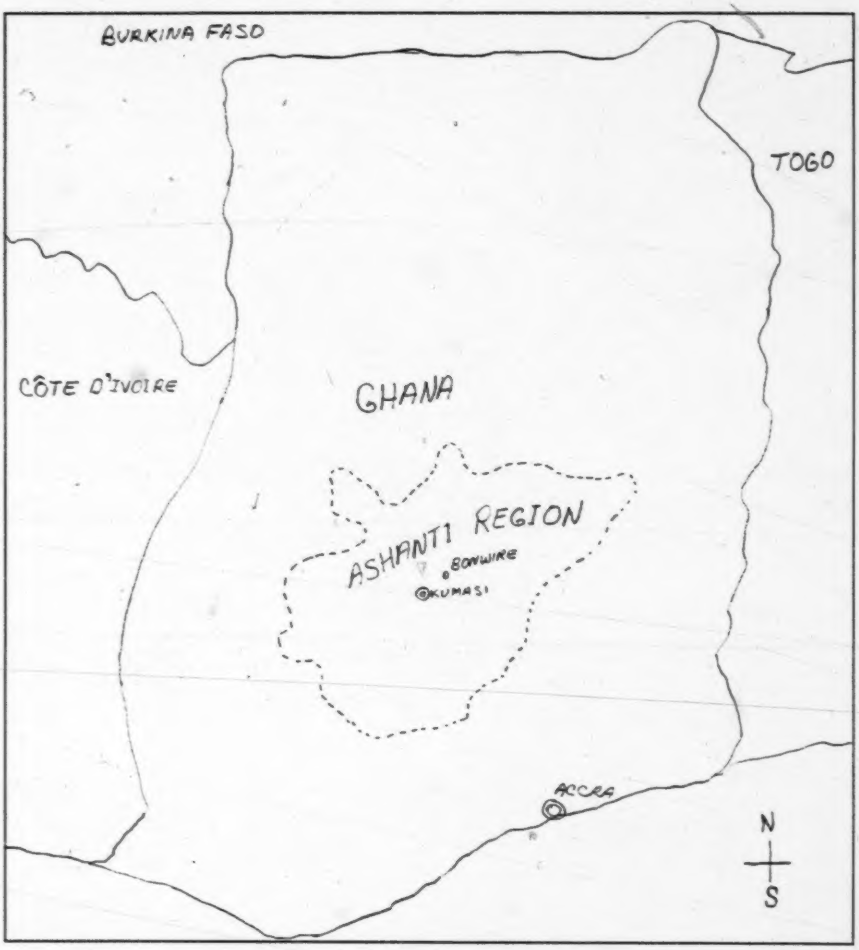
[8] A media announcement, purporting to be from WHO, indicating that Ghana stood second (behind Kenya) in the world's highest childbirth rates was much discussed in Ghana during my research tenure.

Not all of the 9,000 people are resident in Bonwire. There are many people abroad, away at school, or working in other centres and may come home only occasionally. However, Bonwire is still their home and where they would vote in national elections. The remaining population is predominately young - children, teenagers and unmarried young men - and elderly.

Signs of economic hardship are everywhere. There is very little alternative employment in Bonwire, therefore, people in their most productive years may leave the village for wage employment elsewhere while grandparents or elder siblings look after the children. Comparatively, Bonwire is more prosperous than the average village. This is directly due to the kente industry and tourism. While there are few tourists in the Asante Region, Bonwire is a popular destination for them.


BURKINA FASO
TOGO
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ASHANTI REGION
BONWIRE
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Figure 1.1. Map of Ghana showing Ashanti Region.

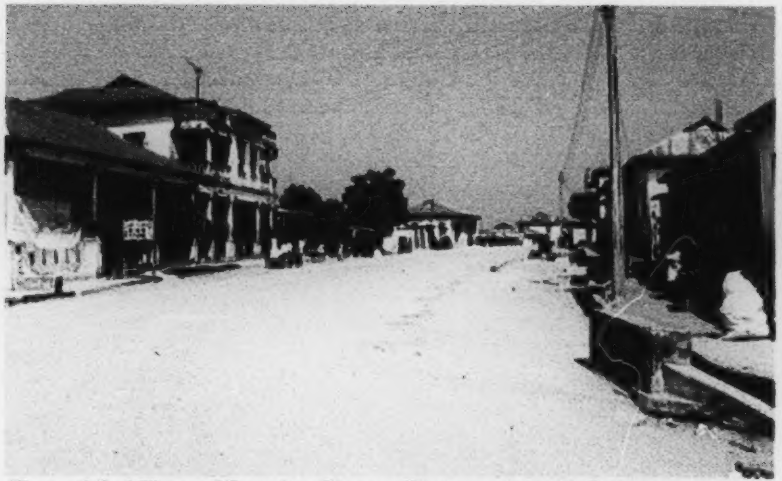

Figure 1.2. Village of Bonwire, Ghana. Photograph by M. Bergen.

Figure 1.3. Tourist transportation in Bonwire. Photograph by M. Bergen.

CHAPTER TWO
RESEARCH BEGINNINGS AND METHODS

> Knowledge - whether adequate or not - never develops in a vacuum but is always embedded in social practises and we can more fully understand the former if we know the latter. (Sayer, 1992:43)

> Worlds of meaning are culture-bound. Within a particular culture, persons have worlds of meanings that have the same general topography despite the fact that a particular field of meanings possessed by one person may be completely absent in another. Persons of the same culture, therefore, have relatively few difficulties communicating about general matters. (Gerhart & Russel, 1990:120)

Prelude to Fieldwork

Several years ago, while I was researching weaving in preparation for a project in Nigeria, I came across a photograph of an Asante man in Kumasi teaching his daughter to weave kente[9] cloth. The brief article[10] accompanying the photograph intrigued me since the author stated that the man was teaching weaving, a male craft, to his daughters because he wanted to pass on his skills. His sons were more interested in getting a formal education, so they could acquire government jobs, instead of learning traditional skills.

This article, and the singular event it recorded made a deep impression on me, and led to my work in Ghana. Later I interviewed Dr. Akuoko, an Asante man who had put himself through school with his weaving skills. He confirmed that there was a strong taboo against women weaving. However, he also knew of a woman who had defied convention and taken up weaving, and had subsequently borne several children. When some other women saw that she was unharmed, they too had learned to weave.

I intended to examine the impact role change across gender[11] lines has on a small traditional community. Therefore, when I arrived in Bonwire, I expected to see many women sitting in the narrow-strip looms weaving the colourful kente strips. Instead, I found that there were only a few women who knew how to weave, and only one who had regular access to a loom. Far from an entrenchment of role change, there was in fact, a strong resistance to that change. Moreover, what started out as a case study on cross-gender role change, became in effect a case study of how tradition interacts with economic conditions to create an environment for a desire for change. This, in turn, creates a two pronged exploration of inquiry. Firstly, who are the agents of change, how is change implemented, and what is the resistance to such change. Secondly, there is a need to examine the appropriateness of the direction of change, in other words, is there a goodness of fit (a solution appropriate to the culture, to the context and to the problem).

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[9] A kente cloth is a cloth made by sewing together from ten to twenty-one kente strips. A kente strip is a 3 to 5 inch wide textile woven on the traditional West African narrow-strip loom. These are designed to be woven all in one piece and then cut apart and sewn together to display a sort of checkerboard design.

[10] I no longer have the article and cannot obtain a copy.

[11] The definition I use for gender is " what is socially recognized as femininity and masculinity" (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1990, p. 23).

I chose the format of this thesis for ease in reading. The material is divided into what appeared to be natural divisions. While the topics are under separate headings, it must be understood that these categories are interconnective in that they influence each other. There is also a strong connection between my review of the literature and my findings in the field. Therefore, I have interspersed the latter throughout to illustrate points of similarity and difference to what other researchers have found. I use sections of these transcribed interviews throughout my thesis where the words (either direct or in translation) of the interviewees are italisized.

Considering Method: The "How" and "Why" of Research

The grounded theory approach to doing cross-cultural field work is particularly appropriate where the "field" is an unknown. As Strauss & Corbin point out "One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (1990:23). Creativity, a vital component of this method, is the procedure which can force the researcher to break through old assumptions to allow for new ideas. Creative thinking was a necessary component for me to begin to formulate a new direction of research while in the field. According to Jax (1989), the idea is to look for emergent patterns from which to interpret the meaning of a particular human experience or event. A pattern of resistance to women engaging in kente weaving emerged very quickly from my first queries and this allowed me to refocus my research.

Hermeneutics, the science and art of interpretation, "seeks to understand aspects of human cultural activity and experience from the perspective of those living through the experience" (Hultgren, 1989:41). It is important to understand then that I do not present here an unequivocal "truth" but a rendering of my engagement with my research findings which are composed of my interpretation of what people told me, what I observed, and how I interacted with the people and the knowledge.

As it was important for me to understand the social context in which men and women formed their opinions I had to 'educate' myself in a number of socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Asante people. To begin with, I approached the Universities at Legon, Winneba, and Kumasi to familiarize myself with the Ghanaian literature on Asante culture and kente weaving research. As this was sparse and not particularly enlightening, I interviewed several professors in the Department of Rural Economy at the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi. I also interviewed weavers who worked at the Culture Centre in Kumasi. Wherever I went, I took the opportunity to ask questions about Asante culture. Taxi drivers, chance acquaintances, professional people and neighbours all became willing and interested participants in my research. I would talk, in a general way, about my findings to anyone who expressed an interest; this would often lead to new insights or avenues of research. For example:

> **Me**: I understand from talking to people that they feel much closer to their mothers than their fathers.
>
> **Youth**: *How true that is. In my case, I respect* [obey] *my mother and listen to her* [heed her advice] *because she is wholly responsible for my education. My father did not contribute.*

This would lead to discussions of the relationship between parents and children, or of the schooling system. If a parent paid for an education, then that meant that the recipient would have the means to support her or himself.

These fortuitous discussions were more often with men as women generally are less educated and often speak little or no English. If my interpreter was present, then the women were also included in the conversation. I found that taxi drivers, who were often keenly interested in my research, were the quintessential philosophers of Ghana. They would gladly engage me in debate on some aspect of my growing knowledge of Asante custom, and I would learn of some-not-so-obvious reason for a cultural practice.

Time in the Field: The "When" and "From Where" of research

Knowledge is generated from the study of "a specific phenomenon in a particular place and time" (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988:511). This research took place during two visits to Ghana: in May, June, July, and December of 1996 and January of 1997. Going to the field twice was more useful than I had anticipated. It afforded me the opportunity to realize just how dynamic the impact of the economic conditions were on the Asante traditional cultural practice. As my first visit had acted as a catalyst for discussion in the community, I was able to determine how strongly held were the opinions of a number of individuals whom I interviewed again.

I was offered accommodations in Bonwire, but because I had some concerns about my autonomy in selecting my own contacts, I chose to make Kumasi my main field base. I lived at first with a local family but later moved to rented lodgings.

I travelled to Bonwire on an almost daily basis and generally left before dark. The people I met, therefore, were disproportionately male. Married women were working in the fields during the daylight hours, or travelled to Kumasi to sell produce. Professional women and unmarried girls often worked and resided in the city or perhaps in other villages. The young women would come to the village to visit their families and go to church on Sundays.

Except on very rare occasions, I did not interview people on Sundays (church and family days) or on Saturdays which were traditionally reserved for funerals and the weekly marketing for village women. In addition to marketing, women usually did their heaviest laundry and housework on Saturdays; they were, therefore far less available for interviews. Nevertheless, I did interview women of a variety of ages.

Scheduling of Interviews

Married women were interviewed outside of their homes while they were resting or at work; sometimes while they were preparing the evening meal or attending to their children. Usually there were several children in attendance. Girls (unmarried women and men are not given adult status) were interviewed at their homes usually in company with other girls and boys of similar age. None of the interviewees had either desire or need for privacy during the interview process.

Men tended to be more visible in the community. Old men would sit and talk under shade trees or on front porches. They would often use this time to manufacture small loom parts or instruct young grandsons in some aspect of weaving. Interviews with them tended to be leisurely and lengthy, and consisted of both formal and informal conversation. Young men and boys would sit around and listen in on our conversations.

Interviews with middle aged men were usually conducted at the work place, either at the loom or in a kente shop. While these interviews were held in very public places, they had the feeling of being much more private. The young men and boys would generally stay out of earshot though other middle-aged men might come and join in the interview.

According to van Manen (1990), the interview may serve several different purposes in the social sciences. The informal, unstructured interview is a flexible tool in that the interviewer usually needs only an outline or general framework of questions. The interviewer must keep in mind the goals of the research, but should be open to new avenues of inquiry. My questions consisted of open-ended queries as well as very specific questions to solicit opinion. This allowed for a continuous feedback of information so that new questions arose out of previous responses. The interviews cannot be compared statistically with one another since they may produce very different data. The information acquired is culturally and historically particulate, however, it can be used comparatively to show the process of change.

Further, because my study was concerned with social opinion (how people felt about women weaving) the questions became more focussed as the fieldwork progressed. For instance, the notion that a woman should "respect" her husband was mentioned by all males and some females. I understood this to mean that it was desirable that a woman should have esteem for her husband. But it was only after numerous interviews that I quite serendipitously learned that respect meant that the woman had to obey her husband. This led to some very pointed questions to clarify the meaning and application of "respect".

According to Cohen, the ethnographic interview is a conversation in which ethnographers "risk the appearance of naivete and ignorance in order continually to satisfy themselves that they have understood what is being said and risk wandering up blind alleys in order to confirm the validity of the ways in which they are beginning to make sense of their data" (1990:226). There was much I was ignorant of at first, but the people were generally willing to answer the most probing questions and would point out my areas of ignorance.

Validity in ethnographic research is more concerned with how valid is the data collection as a technique to uncover or bring one to an understanding of the cultural group or event under observation. I attempted to verify information, especially about common cultural knowledge, by checking with several sources. While perspectives may change from one respondent to another, there was such a consistency in the information that I have confidence of its "truth" value. Younger people were sometimes unsure of what constituted cultural practise in Bonwire but they would say: "*As for me, I don't know*". Between my two field trips, the office of the Kentehene changed hands. I interviewed both Kentehenes and I found their opinions were remarkably consistent one with the other. That said, since the greater part of my research questions dealt with people's personal opinions, I found that these ranged widely and were given candidly. Women and girls were not intimidated by the presence of young men or elders and felt free to state their opinions.

Using an Interpretor

Since many of the residents of Bonwire were not competent in or comfortable with conversing in English, they spoke through my interpreter. I had retained Victor, a young man on holiday from the university of Ghana, as my interpreter. A young (unmarried) woman would not have been appropriate because of the amount of deference that young females must show for all men as well as older women. The fact that Victor was from Kumasi rather than from Bonwire was an advantage as he was not embroiled in or partisan to any ongoing village disputes.

Early on, I was somewhat concerned with the accuracy of Victor's interpretation, but it was clear with the first few interviews that others were also monitoring his interpretation skills. Those who understood English urged him to clarify their meaning when they perceived that the nuances of what was told might not have been understood. I was further concerned that young women might not express themselves fully when faced with a male interpreter. However, I found that they consistently supported each other and were often diametrically opposed (in their opinions) to what the young men said. They were not afraid to express their opinions even when the young men were present at the interviews.

Employing Victor was a fortunate choice. He is a student at the University of Legon in the Department of Performing Arts. He has studied his own culture and has a natural curiosity about people which he often used to ask questions of his own volition. Because he was interested in my research, he was always willing to discuss the day's findings. This was very useful for identifying gaps in my data or in my knowledge of the culture. Further, he knew when it was appropriate to bring gifts and to whom. In one instance, when I had inadvertently been the agency of a major insult in the weaving shed, Victor may well have been instrumental in making my subsequent research much easier. He advised me to pay "apology" money and proffered a profuse apology on my behalf. This was accepted with such good will towards us that I perceived that my credibility was considerably enhanced.

I was fortunate as well that early on, a young man, attached himself to us and became in effect a self-appointed social guide. Ralph (see Figure 2.1) attended many of my interviews and prevented me from making some serious faux pas in the village. He introduced me to the chiefs at appropriate times, and would often suggest other areas of interest. When he was not available, his younger brother would take up the task. Ralph, no doubt, derived some status from being with me, but he also learned much about what the elders in the village thought about gender relations and the future of kente weaving. As he expressed a desire to one day be a master weaver, this also appeared to be a valuable forum of exposure where he was noticed.

Technological Aids

I used a tape recorder for most of the interviews in Bonwire as well as jotting down some field notes. People had no objection to the tape recorder, but I did have some technological breakdowns. In those cases, I would, with Victor's assistance reconstruct as much of the interview as possible. Then, if possible, I interviewed the people again. Victor and I were in the habit of discussing each day's research, either immediately after or the following day to see if there were areas that needed clarifying. Future interviews were planned on this basis.

When I first requested permission to take photographs, people were concerned that I would sell their images as postcards. There was also a considerable concern that I had come to Bonwire to perpetrate a development scam.[12] As both these events had happened in the past, I had to be very open and forthcoming about my research. I took my cameras into the field only on a few occasions and then was careful to film only those who had agreed to it. People were highly sceptical of the purpose of my picture taking and either declined to be photographed or wanted payment for posing. As I did not take any pictures without permission, my photographs are almost exclusively of people in Bonwire. Furthermore, people were concerned that I not take pictures of the poverty in the village. I therefore restricted the content of my photographs to things related to weaving, some portraits of interviewees, and the centre of the village. After the chiefs and elders were satisfied that my research was genuine, most people were quite willing to be interviewed.

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[12] A common scheme for defrauding development agencies was for strangers to come and take pictures of the poverty of the village as well as some improvements and then set up an NGO with themselves as the directors. They would then travel abroad and solicit donations from churches and other organisations. The pictures would be sent periodically to ke p

My Behaviour in the Field

In the introduction to Women in the field: Anthropological experiences, Peggy Golde stresses the need for the researcher to acknowledge her involvement in the research. She suggests that the ethnographer examine both how she may alter that which she studies and how she is altered in turn.

> There is need for more open speculation and consideration of such issues as: how were my data affected by the kind of person I am, by my sex or other apparent attributes, how did my presence alter, positively or negatively, the flux of life under consideration. (1986:5).

She further suggests that the researcher's narrative should include accounts of the frustrations, rewards, understandings and misunderstandings that occur during the field work.

I came to the field in what I consider my middle years. The Asante were quite confused about my age because I came as a student researcher; they generally assumed that I was in my middle to late thirties. I was accorded a relatively high status partly because of my age and the fact that I am a mother and grandmother, but much was made of my size. In Ghana, overweight individuals are invariably wealthier than average; and it was assumed everywhere that I was also well-to-do. Prosperous people are given a higher status and are accorded more respect. Weight and money are linked because only if one has

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the funds flowing. The villagers would never benefit from these schemes. The strangers who came were other Ghanaians or West Africans as well as North Americans and Europeans, so no-one was trusted.

enough money can one become fat. Education is also much admired, particularly among the men, and this further impacted on my status.

Because I perceived that consistency of behaviour in the field would attract a commensurate amount of trust, I tried to cultivate predictable habits. I usually arrived during mid-morning and would leave just prior to sundown. I tried to maintain a cheerful disposition (in spite of the heat) and "greeted" acquaintances and strangers alike. I did not intrude on people in their homes unless I was invited, but chose instead to approach people outside of their homes within public space.

While in Ghana I dressed in a garment called a bou-bou. This is a locally designed, one piece loose fitting, cotton, wax-print dress which is worn by some women in Accra. It was the most comfortable garment I could find, but it also worked to make me more approachable. Early on, I learned my day-of-the-week name, and used this knowledge when talking with women. People appreciated any efforts I made to "fit in". While I remained very noticeable and was often referred to as **Obrune** (white person), I also was easily distinguished from the tourists who dressed in European clothes.

I had to learn a great deal of patience in the field. In the beginning I often felt "stood-up" when I made appointments until I learned to seize the moment and either do the interview immediately or try again at my convenience. I "stood-up" an appointment once and much to my chagrin was scolded for keeping Ghanian time. In this way I learned what was acceptable behaviour for me; that I was held to different standards.

I found it very difficult when I first returned to Bonwire for my second stint of field work. I had not anticipated that I as a returnee was expected to bring gifts. Additionally, I had told people that I would also be purchasing some textiles for my department's textile collection.[13] I am afraid that some people felt offended when I did not purchase from them. I therefore left most of the purchasing until my last week in Bonwire.

The "Gifts" of the Field

The good experiences far outweighed the bad. There were times when the friendliness of the Asante resulted in completely unexpected interviews. I met a school teacher while waiting for our taxi to fill with fares. She invited me to her place and told me of growing up in Bonwire. I met a Fanti man (part of the coastal Akan) who instructed me on how extra marital economic relational arrangements are used by young married couples to supplement their incomes.

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[13] While in the field, I collected a quantity of textiles and the weaving implements i.e. a loom and different stages of the Weaving process. I used video and photographs to document the use of the technology. These documents will reside permanently in the Clothing and Textiles Collection in the Department of Human Ecology at the University of Alberta.

At the invitation of the Twafohene (Acting Chief of Bonwire) I attended an Akwasidae[14] "traditional court" where I was able to observe a case which concerned a dispute between a husband and wife over his failure to pay financial support for his children. This was very pertinent to my research subject since I could observe not only what were the expected gender roles, but also the roles of the Queen Mother and the chiefs (see Figure 2.2). Furthermore, as this case also concerned a traditional curse, I learned first-hand, as it were, how Christianity and traditional religion operated side by side in village life.

I was also invited to attend two weddings, a Christian wedding in Bonwire and a traditional wedding in another village. At the traditional wedding, where I was the only non-Twi speaking person, a stranger volunteered to explain the proceedings and their meanings. Here again I could observe formal gender interaction and the differences between the old and the new customs.

My research also produced some surprising outcomes for the village of Bonwire. My presence, and the questions I asked prompted both the Queen Mother and Mrs. Prempeh, the director of CEDEP (Centre for the Development of People) to reexamine why prior projects encouraging women to weave had failed. As a consequence, it was made one of the three areas highlighted for development in 1997. In the village, people engaged the question of whether women should be allowed to weave and I found that at least one young man changed his opinion.

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[14] This is a traditional Akan religious festival held every 42 days. The Queen Mothers and Chiefs gather at their lineage houses to pay homage to their gods and ancestors in the morning, and to hold court in the afternoon.

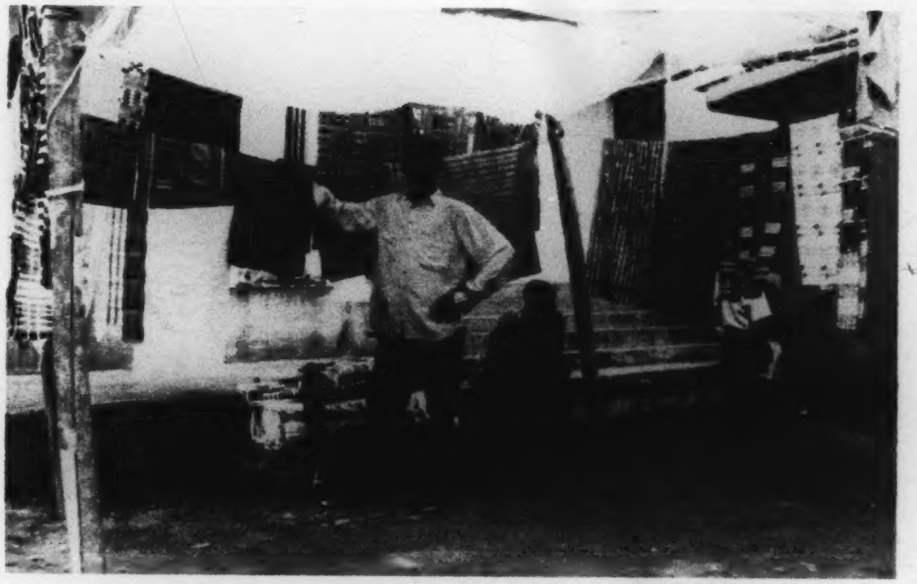

Figure 2.1. Ralph in his outdoor kente shop, Bonwire. Photograph M. Bergen.

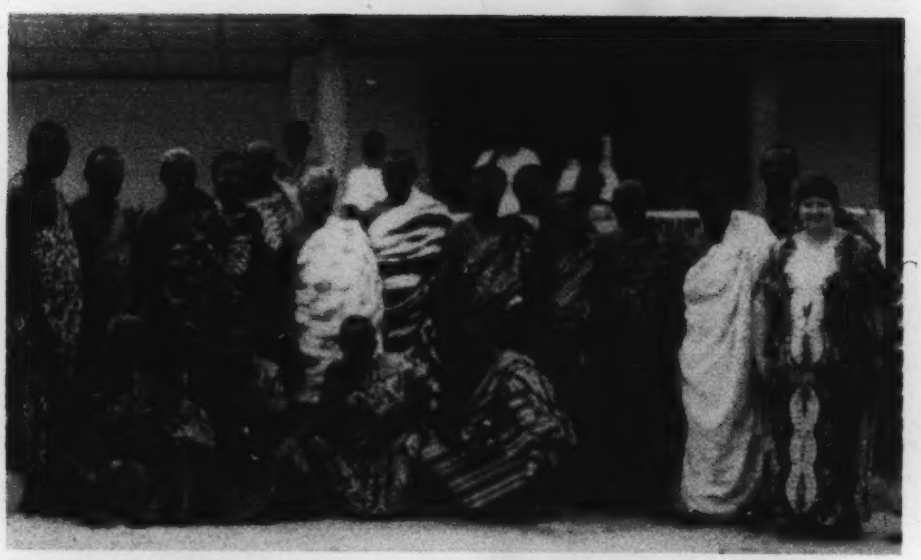

Figure 2.2. Chiefs of Bonwire. From L. to R. Back row: Assemblyman, Jasuahene, Adontenhene, Twafouhene (Acting Chief), Jasehene, Queen Mother, ?, Asonahene, Mamahene, Akuamuhene, Akwamukonterehene, Ebanmuhene, Kentehene, Myself. Sitting: Committee member, Linguist, Committee chairman, Etiahene. Photograph by M. L. Fumee.

CHAPTER THREE

PROFILES OF RESPONDENTS

> A distinctive feature of qualitative work is its reliance on the words and voices of the people being studied. (Judd, Smith & Kidder, 1991, p. 300)

The people I interviewed during my field work, regardless of whether they participated in shorter or longer interviews, together make up the mosaic of thought and opinion of what is "Asante"; what is just and appropriate for kente and for Bonwire. I have recorded their voices, analysed their responses, and formed my own opinions of how their culture impacts on them individually and collectively. These interviews cannot be measured "as having a truth value, as being "correct" or false" (Cohen, 1984, p. 223), rather they explore meaning in people's relationships to their society, to their gender and the other, to their own experiences. Therefore, I think it is appropriate to include some biographical information and identify the speaker. While many of these interviews were through an interpreter, the personalities of the people often come through every bit as strongly as the ones who spoke in English.

This chapter does not include any interviews, nor do I profile everyone interviewed, but I will present a representative range of interviewees. I have divided them by age and by gender; each group is preceded by a simple graph and followed by a short description. Age groups for women are divided into the following categories: elderly (60+); middle-aged (women in their 40's and 50's); women in their 30's; women in their 20's; and teenagers. Males are divided into: elderly (in their 80's); men in their 60's and 70's; middle-aged (in their 40's and 50's; men in their 30's; youths (20+); and teenage boys (see Figure 3.1).

The categories were divided at what appeared to me to be natural age breaks. Those within an age bracket have a similarity of responsibility. I use first names for those under the age of 30, titles and first names or surnames for older individuals to identify the speakers. I do not think it appropriate to use interviewees full names here other than in the case of chiefs and professionals. Nor do I think it appropriate to change the names[14] of respondents to hide their identity from themselves or their community. Interviews were not private affairs, however, I do not wish to identify them for outsiders.

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[14] Most Asante have more than one name. This may or may not include: a Christian first name; a week day first name (according to the day of the week one is born); a traditional first name (usually after an ancestor); and choice of at least two family names (father's and mother's lineage names); and married women can choose to use their husbands' surname.

Elderly women - aged 60+

The elderly women are sisters, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers of weavers. They live in either their matrilineal homes, under the protection of a brother or uncle, or they live under the protection of one of their adult children, usually a son. Elderly women generally are past their income producing years and are relying on members of their matrilineage to support them. They have invested their productive and reproductive energies in building up resources for their matrilineage by giving birth to and raising and educating productive members. This should be the time in their lives when they reap the rewards of their investments. However, elderly women may be very vulnerable in times of economic hardship. Further, they also suffer neglect due to the subtle restructuring of family loyalties brought about by the influence of western ideas of the nuclear family. The women I interviewed were still actively working. They were freeing up younger family members for income- generating work by doing the housework and minding the young children.

I interviewed four women in this category. Two practised Christianity and two adhered to Traditional Religion. They all held strong opinions on whether women should be allowed to weave, however, they differed on the amount of influence they felt they had on younger women. Three are profiled here.

Maame Akua: This elderly woman is more than 90 years[15] old. Her oldest child is 75 years old. She practices traditional religion; she never went to school but grew cassava to support her family. She owns two houses because she has a large family. She is still an active woman working about her house. She was the wife of a weaver and is the mother and grandmother of more than ten weavers. She was interested in weaving when she was younger, and would have become involved if there had not been a taboo. She does not approve of women weaving now.

Maame Comfort is unsure how old she is but her brother thought she was over 75 but younger than 80. She lives in the family home with her brother (who is the head of the household) and various younger relatives. She practices traditional religion. She was cleaning and sweeping the first time I spoke to her, and was washing clothes and minding children the second time I met her. She disapproves of women weaving and is prepared to censure any women she sees sitting in a loom.

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[15] Many elderly people do not know their precise age, particularly when they have not had formal education. I was told there is a tendency to exaggerate age among the elderly, nonetheless, I use the ages they gave me.

Maame Yaa: She is 60 years old, a Christian, and a member of the Kentehene's matrilineage. She resides in the household of her matrilineal uncle. I talked to her on a Sunday right after she returned from church. She is aware that some women know how to weave, and does not believe that it is harmful to women, however, she disapproves.

Name	Age	Religion	Wanted to weave?	Should women weave?
Maame Akua	90	Traditional	Yes	No, it is outragious.
Maame Comfort	70's	Traditional	No	No, there is no respect.
Maame Yaa	60	Christian	No	No, who can stop them?
? Woman	70's	Christian	No	No, I don't want to talk about it

Elderly men (80's)

Elderly men have a higher status than elderly women. They are the heads of households, and may still be the fathers of children or adolescents. They may be actively earning an income from weaving and selling kente, or by managing or apprenticing weavers, often their younger sons and grandsons. Few men (especially in the past) reached this age. Those that do, command a high degree of respect as lineage heads (the oldest living male of the lineage) and are listened to in matters concerning the welfare of the village.

Three men, were interviewed for this category. Two practised traditional religion, one practised Christianity. Two were favourable towards young women becoming weavers; one was not. Two are profiled here.

Nana Opanin: Nana practices traditional religion. He is in his eighties now, but has been weaving from the time his father taught him to weave at the age of 12. He has taught his sons and they have taught their sons to weave. He has four wives and a large family. His younger sons are learning to weave from him. He is vehmenently opposed to women weaving and claims to have no knowledge that any women have been succesfull at weaving.

Nana Kofi is 87 years old. He started weaving for his father when he was six years old and worked for him until he was of marriageable age. He taught all his own sons to weave. He has over 70 descendants. He is the brother to Maame Comfort, and the father-in-law to Obeng. He never had the chance to attend school. He practices traditional religion but many of his children and grandchildren are Christian.

Name	Age	Religion	Should women weave?	Why/Why not
Nana Opanin	80's	Traditional	No, did not happen here.	Taboo
Nana Kofi	87	Traditional	Yes, should be allowed.	Modern age
Papa Kwame	85	Christian	Yes, should be allowed.	Modern age

Men in their 60's and 70's

Men, when they reach this age may be slowing down somewhat, but they are productive members of the community. These men are fathers and grandfathers. If they have done well, they will have two or more wives. They are the heads of large families. Some of them may have had some formal education.

I interviewed four men in this age group. All are still weaving. Three have had some schooling, three are Christian and one practises both traditional and Christian religion. Two of the men are doing very well financially and two are experiencing financial hardship.

Mr. Badua (see Figure 3.4) is a Linguist[16] and very active in the Anglican church. He is the head of a household of 17 people, his children and grandchildren. Six of the people are weavers, including his daughter Salomey. They are solely supported by weaving kente. As they do not have the financial means to invest in yarns, they weave on a contract basis. He has the only garden I saw in Bonwire. It is a large garden beside his house compound. One of the days I interviewed him, he was carving pattern sticks and keeping an eye on his grandchildren.

Master Weaver (see Figure 3.2) is over sixty and has been the Master Weaver in Bonwire for five years. He learned weaving from his uncle when he was 15. He has taught a lot of people to weave but does not now have an apprentice. He practises traditional religion. He has one wife in Bonwire and another one in another village. Since his sons were born to the wife in the other village, he will not be teaching them to weave. He has many nephews who weave. He 'supports' both families by giving the women money every day and supplies them with one or two cloths a year. The wives supplement this with selling produce from the farm. He is fortunate in that he can earn more money than most people can from weaving, but he also works hard. He weaves 13 hours a day, six days a week. He was weaving in his matrilineal home when I interviewed him; the work was a commission for the most difficult pattern known to the Asante, Brain Upon Brain. It will take him 16 weeks to complete a 12-yard cloth for which he'll receive more than $1000.00 Cdn.

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[16] A linguist speaks on behalf of others.

Name	Age	Religion	Should women weave?	Why/why not
Mr. Badu	70?	Christian	Yes	Modern age, financial
Mr. Cophie	60+	Christian	Yes	Modern sceintific age
Master Weaver	65	Traditional	No	Taboo, tradition
Old Kentehene	60+	Trad&Chris	Yes	Modern sceintific age

Middle-aged women (40's and 50's)

Middle-aged women are at the height of their productive lives, but have usually finished the reproductive portion. They may be widows or divorced, or if their husbands have taken younger wives, they are less concerned with catering to a husband. Thus they have more time to devote to income-generating activities and leave the housework to younger members of their matrilineage. Women of this age group have a maximum amount of dependents. They may be supporting daughters (single and married), school-aged sons, nephews and nieces, younger sisters, grandchildren, as well as helping to support either or both parents if these are still living. The women who no longer live in the matrilineal home are heads of households.

Middle-aged women are so busy that few were available for interviews. I interviewed only three women, but briefly spoke to two others. All five approved of women becoming weavers and two had daughters who were learning to weave. Three are household heads, two are married, all are Christian. Two of the women managed weavers, four farmed, and only two could be said to be relatively comfortable financially. Three lived in abject poverty.

Madam Akosua: This 53 year old woman is mother to eight children and grandmother to four. She was not born in Bonwire but came to live there as a young child after her mother died. She never had a chance to attend school and became a fourth wife to a much older man while she was still quite young. She heads an all female household in which she supports 16 people for food and pays half the school fees for the school-age children. Her sons of weaving age live with their father and do not contribute to her household.

She has been a part-time manager of kente weavers for 10 years and farms for food. The day I interviewed her as the children were eating their noon meal and she was peeling yams for the evening meal, Madam Akosua had already walked to the farm twice, a total of 10 miles, to cultivate her crops. After cooking the meal, she would bathe the children, wash the laundry and the dishes and cook one more meal before she could go to bed. The next day she would repeat this cycle.

Madam Afikopa is a fourty-five year old farmer married to a weaver, and mother of a fourteen year old girl who is learning to weave from her (the daughter's) brother. She is a member of the Kentehene's lineage.

Name	Age	Religion	Should be allowed to weave?	Occupation
Madam Akosua	53	Christian	Yes, but women have too much work.	Farm, manages weavers
Madam Afikopa	45	Christian	Yes, wanted to learn	Farm, daughter weaves
Madam Yaa	58	Christian	Yes, is modern, technological age	Manages weavers
woman	50's	Christian	Yes	Farm, daughter weaves
woman	50's	Christian	Yes	Farm

Madam Yaa is a 58 year old widow of a weaver who has raised her six children on her own since her husband died 15 years ago. She has managed kente weavers for 35 years and has developed a very profitable business. Her business has supported many people through the years as well as supporting three of her children through college. She, herself, has had no formal education. She has had no desire to marry again; most widows take care of their children and do not remarry in Bonwire. I interviewed her on the beautiful porch of her home while she was resting. She no longer works as hard as she once did because her business is flourishing.

Middle-aged Men (40's and 50's)

These men are experiencing the most productive portion of their lives. They are at the top of their weaving skills and can command the best prices for their work. They may have already raised one family and have begun a second family. They could be grandfathers if their daughters have married, although their sons, at under thirty, would still be too young to marry. They are household heads, married (though not living with their wives) and may be supporting a number of matrilineal relatives. They are teaching their sons or nephews to weave. Many men in this age group are employed outside of Bonwire if they are not involved with weaving.

I interviewed three weavers in this category from Bonwire and two at the Culture Centre in Kumasi. At least five of them practised Christianity, although some of them may have also practised Traditional religion. All were in favour of women learning how to weave. They did, however, express concern with how weaving would fit into women's lives. These men recognised how busy women were and thought that adding weaving could overburden women and lead to ill-health.

Name	Age	Religion	Should women be allowed to weave?	Comment
Mr. Owusui	56	Chris. & Trad.	Yes, modern age	sister was weaver
Papa Joseph	51	Christian	Yes, give a chance	daughter weaves
Mr. P. K.	54	Christian	Yes	daughter weaves
Mr. Adai	40+	Christian	Yes, is not magic	Culture Centre
Mr. Arhin	50+	N/A	Yes, but is difficult	Culture Centre

Mr. Owusui (see Figure 3.3) is a 56 year old man who is currently the shed leader in the weaving shed which was built for women. He learned to weave before he was six and stayed with his father until he was 19. He would be willing to teach women to weave. He is a believer in both Christianity and in the traditional Gods. He is disturbed by the "carelessness" of some villagers to the traditional religion, but does not consider traditional practice as unchangeable. I interviewed him at his loom.

Mr. Kwasi weaves at the Culture Centre in Kumasi. He Has been working there since the 1970's when the weaving program first started.

Married Women (30's)

Women marry at a much younger age than do men in Bonwire. They enter the busy reproductive years when they are still in their teens or early 20's so that by this age, they may have several children to support. Most have had minimal schooling, and therefore must rely on traditional means of subsistence. This is the second most vulnerable group among my interviewees. After they marry, they are either living in the matrilineal home or, in some cases, living in their father's home. The husband, if he is willing to, and able, gives his wife money to support the children. However, statistics show that many men are not supporting their children as they did in the past. These women then depend on the matrilineage to help support the children just when the relatives are withdrawing support for the women. Their husbands may be involved in work other than weaving or may even have travelled to work in another area.

I interviewed three women from Bonwire, one from a neighbouring village and one from Kumasi. All were Christian; one was well educated. The woman from Kumasi was one of the original weavers at the Culture Centre. The other women disagreed with women weaving although one said it would be alright if the Queen Mother was in favour of it.

Margaret, who is married to a weaver, is 33 years old. She has three small children. Her husband is not one who weaves for the Asantehene. She will not allow her daughters to weave. She is aware that several women have tried weaving and were not barren but it was still not accepted in the village for women to weave and won't be.

Akosua, a household head, is the mother of two children and has no husband to help support them. She has been managing weavers for the past two years. She buys yarns, gives them to weavers and then sells the cloth. She went into managing to support her children and sells four to six pieces a month. She also has a little farm for eating and rents out cleared farmland. She was educated to form four level.

Mrs. Juantuah works in the craft shop at the National Culture Centre in Kumasi. She is one of the women who were trained to weave by Mr. Idan. From 1976 to 1992 she demonstrated broadloom weaving for tourists. She did not weave narrow strips.

Name	Age	Religion	Should women be allowed to weave?	Occupation
Afia	30+	Christian	No, prefer not, is not women's business	N/A
Akusua	36	N/A	No, is taboo	manages weavers
Margaret	33	Christian	No, is tradition for men	sells food
Constance	36	Christian	Not unless is allowed	teacher
Diana	30+	Christian	Yes, was a weaver	Culture Centre

Married men in their 30's

This is the age group of men who are establishing themselves for the future. Most of the men have had more than eight years of education, and some have gone well beyond that. Their families are young and their wives are in need of maximum support but their matrilineal relatives may be exerting pressure on them to contribute more at home. This is also the time when men may leave the village to work at something other than weaving. If they are still weaving at this age, they will likely remain weavers.

I interviewed five men from Bonwire and one from Kumasi in this age group. At least four practised Christianity, two were not weaving at present. All but two supported women's weaving if proper arrangements (i.e. the ancestors were appeased) were made.

Mr. Marfoh is the 37 year old father of 8 children. His father taught him to weave when he was six years old. He learned after school and by the time he was 13 to 14, his father purchased a loom for him. He is a practising Christian (Methodist), but believes in the Asante traditions. I interviewed him at his loom which is set up in his matrilineal compound.

Mr. Obeng is a married man in his thirties. He is the brother to Adwoa and the son-in-law of Nana Kofi. He learned to weave from his father when he was 12 years old and still in school. However, his father died before he could give his son a loom, so he had to work for his own loom. He weaves on a regular basis but has to supplement his earnings by playing music for funerals. I interviewed him at his father-in-law's home.

Mr. Dapaah is a 38 year old weaver in the Culture Centre in Kumasi. He learned to weave at the Jachig Training Centre, a school for the disabled in Kumasi. He was one of the first students. He learned to weave on both the traditional and the broadloom. He is married to a trader and has five children, all girls.

Name	Age	Religion	Should women be allowed to weave?
Mr. Marfoh	37	Christian	No, it is against tradition.
Mr. Obeng	30's	Christian	Yes, sister weaves. They should allow it.
Mr. Dapaah	38	Christian	Yes, but it is difficult for women.
Instructor	30's	?	Yes, but only if the Kentehene agrees.
Raymond	30	Christian	I am indifferent, but it is possible for them.
Mr. Tawiah	30's	N/A	No, it is against tradition and it is taboo.

Women in their 20's

Women in their twenties are marrying and beginning their families. Most of them will not have more than a JSS (Junior Secondary) education and some have only primary schooling. They generally live with a parent or other relative, but not with the husband. Those women who have not yet married, may live with a relative in Kumasi so as to have access to employment. There are few opportunities for young women and girls to find income-generating employment in Bonwire. Therefore, the desire to earn money propels individuals to leave the village. Girls who leave the village tend not to marry as young, so the matrilineage may exert pressure on their daughters to marry and stay in the village.

I interviewed four women from this age group, one of whom now lives in Kumasi. Two of these women know how to weave and a third would like to learn. They are very supportive of women weaving.

Salomey, 27 years old, is a weaver. She is married to a man from another village but lives in her father's house along with her siblings. She first became interested in weaving when she was 15 years old. Her father was surprised that she was interested but started to teach her in 1984. He also provided her with her own loom, which is set up on the covered porch of her father's house. She demonstrated her weaving skills for me while her father tried to keep Salomey's three year old daughter from bothering her at the loom. Her brothers know how to weave and a younger sister is now interested in learning.

Ama is a 20 year old single woman. She learned to weave on her brother's loom when she was seventeen. Her brother never objected but her grandparents threatened her with barrenness. She never believed them because she had seen the women who did have children after weaving. Now she lives in Kumasi where she plaits hair for a living.

Name	Age	Religion	Should women weave?	Comments
Ama	20	Christian	Yes, I can weave.	Plaits hair/ Kumasi
Abena	27	Christian	Yes, I support it.	Is married/ farms
Salomey	27	Christian	Yes, learned from father	Married/ is weaver
Akouse	20+	Christian	Yes, I want to learn.	Married

Male youths

Males in this age group have finished school and are not yet in a financial position to marry. Unless someone can assist them to further their education, they are forced to develop their skills as weavers to earn money. Many have little or no support from their relatives and must weave to earn their own chop money. Most of them are trying to save money to finance themselves for further education. As my interviews from this age group are all under twenty-five, I presume that it takes them until that age to save enough to leave Bonwire.

I interviewed seven youths, all of whom are living in Bonwire. Two want to make weaving their life's work, one has resigned himself to weaving, and the others are weaving only until they have saved enough to return to school. All but two are Christian, although a number of them expressed respect for and a certain amount of belief in traditional religion. Five were strongly against women weaving, two approved and would be willing or even desired to marry a weaver; two approved with heavy reservations.

Jacob is 21 years old and the grandson of Mr. Badu, and the matrilineal nephew of Salomey. His father taught him to weave when he was fifteen and he is now weaving in the women's weaving shed. He approves of and admires women weavers.

Kwaku is 23 and weaves in the weaving shed. He was 14 when he started to weave and still in school. He is not married and is a full time weaver. He will not marry a woman who weaves. He is never going to allow his wife to weave. He would leave her if she insisted on weaving.

Sampson is 23 years old and weaves in the weaving shed. He was 15 years old when he started, his father taught him and he is now working on his own loom. He acquired the loom himself. He had to buy it himself. He is not yet married and would not marry a woman who weaves.

Name	Age	Religion	Should women weave? Why/ Why not	Marry weaver?	Stay weaving?
Jacob	21	Christian	Yes, I admire it	Yes	?
Kwaku	23	Christian	No, domestic work	No	2nd choice
Sampson	23	Both	No, domestic work	No	2nd choice
John	23	Christian	No, not woman's job	No	?
Yaw	22	Traditional	No, taboo	No	Yes
Osei	20	Christian	Yes, individual decision	Maybe	No
Fred	24	Christian	Yes, avoid pregnancy	No	No

Teenage girls

The difference between these girls and their older sisters is just a matter of a few years. The younger girls may still be in school, but will not be expecting to go on. They are learning housekeeping and child minding to prepare them for marriage. There is virtually no other work for them in Bonwire. They are unable to communicate in English, and can therefore not work in tourism, as their brothers can. Teenage girls have very little status in the village. Young brothers, who tend to have more education, will often act as a screen between their sisters and the outside. Yet, these girls are eager for employment and would be willing to learn any skill to earn money.

I interviewed six girls, all of whom are Christian. They are supportive of women weaving and one girl who is self-taught is a fairly accomplished weaver. Another girl is learning to weave from her brother.

Sister Adwoa is an unmarried 18 year old girl without any children. She lives in a female household headed by her mother. Her aunt, older sister and cousin are the other adults in the house and there are several small children. Her mother farms; her father died before she started to weave. She taught herself to weave by watching her brother and other young men weave and when they left the loom, she would jump in. One of the days I interviewed her, she was winding yarn onto spools to earn a bit of money. Another day she demonstrated her weaving skills in the women's weaving shed (which the men use) despite a very heated opposition, which did not perturb her in the least. She has finished JSS (Junior Secondary) but will not be going on.

Sister Aquiah, cousin to Adwoa, is 18 years old and has finished 6th form. Her brothers were given higher education. She is pleased and impressed that her "sister" is learning to weave. She believes that this is as unique as a woman driving a train or flying a plane.

Name	Age	Religion	Should women weave?	Want to weave?
Abetcha	18	Christian	Yes	Don't know
Asantua	19	Christian	Yes	Yes, but didn't have time
Adwoa	18	Christian	Yes	Is a weaver
Aquiah	18	Christian	Yes	Would help sister if she could
Theresa	14	Christian	Yes	No
Ama	16	Christian	Yes	Yes, is hoping to learn soon.

Teenage boys

Even the youngest teenage boys in Bonwire are beginning to plan for their futures. They are attending school and learning to weave after hours. If they were fortunate enough to have a father or uncle who concerned himself with their well-being, they will now be earning money by contracting with the family. The older boys may already start to weave for themselves. The idea of marriage is far into the future, and can only be contemplated after the future has been assured.

I interviewed nine boys in this age group. Only two of these boys expected to stay in weaving. These same two approved of women weaving, and one of them expressed a preference for a wife who could weave. Five boys were opposed to women weaving. All those who were asked were Christian.

Name	Age	Religion	Should women weave?	Marry weaver?	Stay weaving?
Peter	18	?	No, Taboo, domest.	No	?
Ralph	19	Christian	Yes, I admire it	Yes	Yes
Kwaku	19	Christian	Yes, teaches sister	Maybe	?
Joseph	14	Christian	No, is men's work	No	No
Boy	13	Christian	Yes, only w/o child.	Yes	Maybe
Isaac	18	Christian	No, domestic work	No	?
Sampson	17	Christian	No, maybe taboo	No	No
John	17	Christian	No, too much to do	No	No
James	17	Christian	Yes, is good to do	Maybe	Yes

Ralph, a 19 year old, has been weaving for 6 years. He learned from his father, who collected the money from his weaving and bought him a loom. He wants to become a master weaver and already has a "shop' where he sells his own cloths as well as the cloths of other weavers. Both he and his younger brother are keen to make international contacts for selling kente. Both brothers approve of women weaving.

Isaac, an 18 year old boy was taught to weave by his grandfather when he was ten years old. His father gave him a loom when he was still in school. He is a Christian but disapproves of women weaving. His future wife could not be a weaver.

Joseph, a 14 year old boy is attending school but weaves for three hours a day on school days. He started to weave three years ago by watching other weavers and "jumping" into their looms when they took their breaks. He is only capable of single weave yet. He wants to finish school and become a professional man, doctor or technician, but you can not be a son of Bonwire without knowing how to weave.

Community Leaders

Three of the most important people I interviewed - important because they speak for more than themselves - are the Queen Mother and the two Kente Chiefs. I will end this chapter by profiling them separately and differently. My interviews with them showed clearly that they hold private opinions on topics that are separate from the opinions they hold in the capacity of their offices. For example, the Queen Mother is responsible for women's affairs in the village, but even when she knows of a woman whose rights are being abused, she cannot act unless the woman approaches her to intercede on her behalf. This creates a difficulty for her as she cannot act as a private individual would to correct the situation. The office she occupies has precedence over her private inclination. In the same way, the new Kentehene has to promote the welfare of kente weaving in Bonwire even if it means approving of women weaving if that is what it takes to save the industry no matter what his private opinion is.

Queen Mother Rosina Cobbina (see Figure 3.5) is the most powerful woman in Bonwire. She was selected for this position by her lineage because of her wisdom and her insights into human behaviour. As the only woman in the all male governing circle of Bonwire, she is an advocate for all the village women but is especially concerned with the well-being of the girls of Bonwire. She has the lineage palace and a residence home in Bonwire as well as a residence in Kumasi. She owns two successful businesses in Kumasi, a fashionable shop and a Forex Bureau (money exchange) as well as shares in an overseas enterprise. Her opinions carry much weight with all the chiefs and the people of the village, and she stands second only to the Paramount Chief of Bonwire. She approves of women learning to weave.

Former **Kentehene Nana Akwasi Gyamfi** (see Figure 3.6) was born into the lineage from which Kente Chiefs are selected and I was informed by people outside of the family that he was well respected and had performed his responsibilities well. However, his own lineage decided to retire him and installed a new Chief (as is their right) between my visits to Ghana. The main reason for this change was probably to put a more educated and English speaking man into the position. There are efforts afoot to make Bonwire a principal tourist destination and as such it would be preferable to have a bigger voice to the Government offices in Accra.

I visited with Nana on both occasions and was impressed with the quiet dignity of the man. He is the head of a large family and has many sons who weave. He would support any females in his family who wanted to weave but there are none who have shown an interest. He learned to weave from his father (and later from his grandfather) when he was six so that by the time he was 15, he was an accomplished weaver. He never had a formal education. He practises both traditional religion and Methodist Christianity. He sometimes has a problem with dual religion but so do others who practice both.

Nana Ampem Dankwah II, the new Kentehene, was installed during the summer of 1996. He is an educated man, speaks English and is a pharmacist by profession. His matrilineal home is in Bonwire, but he resides mainly in Kumasi. He is also a weaver. When I arranged for an interview, he encouraged other members of his family to talk to me. He is new in his office and somewhat tentative about village policy, but will no doubt learn quickly since he has the support of his matrilineage and by extension, the cooperation of the other lineages of the village. There are two girls in his extended family who are learning to weave. He approves of it as long as they learn to weave in "a quality way".

Figure 3.1. Young man weaving kente cloth on a narrow-strip loom. Photograph by M. Bergen.

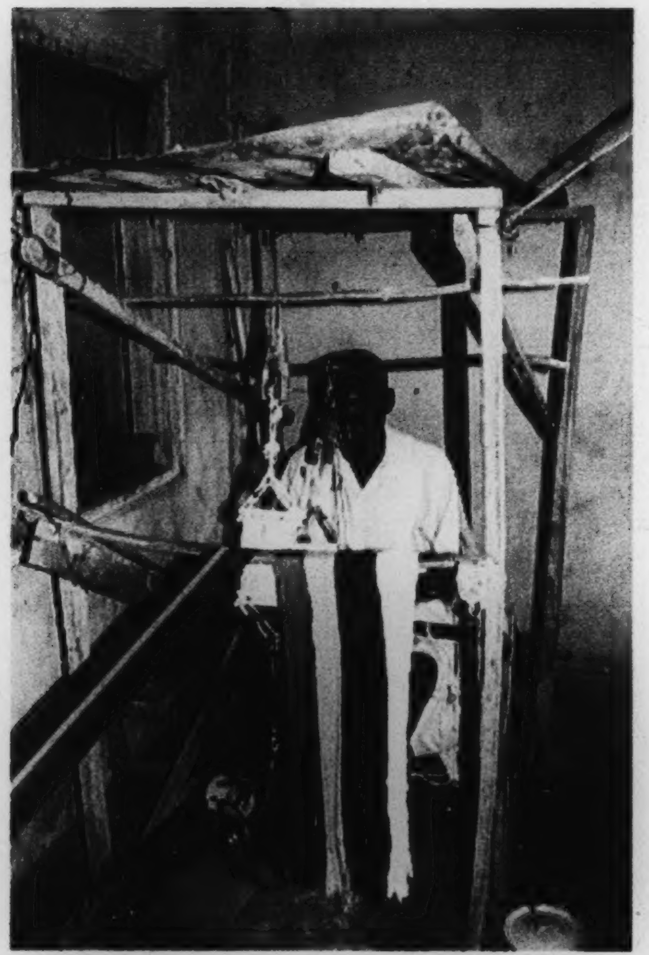

Figure 3.2. Master Weaver at his loom. Note the supplementary yarns used for double weave. Photograph M. Bergen.

Figure 3.3. Shed leader in women's weaving shed, Mr. Owusui. Photograph by M. Bergen.

Figure 3.4. Mr. Badu, the man who taught his daughter to weave. Photograph by M. Bergen.

Figure 3.5. Queen Mother of Bonwire, Nana Rosina Cobbina, at work in her office in Kumasi. Photograph by M. Bergen.

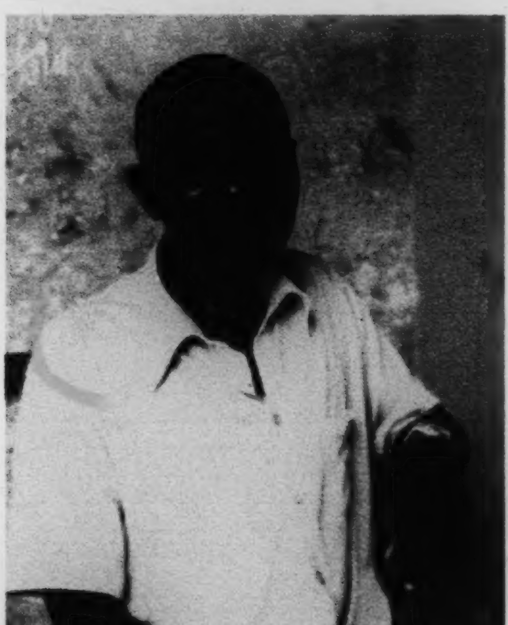

Figure 3.6. Former Kentehene Nana Akwasi Gyamfi . Photograph by M. Bergen.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MATRILINEAL SYSTEM AND ASANTE GENDER EQUATION

> African women are weighed down by superstructural forms deriving from the pre-colonial past. In most African societies, whether patrilineal or matrilineal, gender hierarchy, male supremacy or sex asymmetry (or whatever term we wish to use) was known and taken for granted. Even in matrilineal societies, women were still subordinate to men, considered as second in place to men; the only difference being that inheritance and authority pass through the women to the male of the line. Men are still dominant in private and public life. The ideology that men are naturally superior to women in essence and in all areas, affects the modern day organization of societal structures. This ideology prolongs the attitudes of negative discrimination against women. (Ogundipe-Leslie, M., 1994, P. 34)

Introduction

In Ghana there are three major cultural groups as well as numerous smaller ones. Marriage and residence, kinship, and descent and inheritance are reckoned in a number of different ways (Oppong, 1987). Any research in Ghana of a sociological, economic, or gendered nature must take into account the marriage and kinship patterns of the research population.

Kinship structure, a vital component of how a society views the "ordering" of the near human environment, has an impact on the individual's standing from the moment of birth to well beyond death. Kinship structure accounts for, and places, each individual into an arrangement of relationships which are dictated by gender and age. The matrilineal kinship system is but another ordering of relationships within the context of gender. "Contemporary matrilineal societies are not matriarchal; power is invested in the maternal uncles and brothers, and sons of women" (Brydon & Chant, 1989:84). Females in Asante society are destined to give birth to and nurture the next generation of members of their matrilineage. Males are destined to support their matrilineage and father the children of an alien matrilineage.

Rattray's (1929/1969) research on the Asante kinship system, political structure, their art and culture at the beginning of this century is considered to be the standard and still most important reference on the subject (Cutrufelli, 1985). Although Independence, capitalism, and Christianity have impacted on Asante society to a large extent, the kinship system has remained intact. Fortes (1950/1967), continuing in Rattray's footsteps, examined the relationships between members of the lineage in greater detail. He examined the kinship system and the influence it had on sibling, spousal, and parent and child relationships. These relationships, but not the kinship system itself, are somewhat in flux now. Schneider's (1961) work is part of a larger analysis of matrilineal kinship structures and the relationship mechanisms which make it work. Both Fortes (1950/1967) and Schneider (1961) have identified the difficulties that the traditional political structure and the consequent loyalty to the matrilineage created for the conjugal family relations.

It is important to examine how these systems operated in the past to understand the influence they continue to have today. Furthermore, the Ghanaian political and economic systems, based on a Western model of democracy, are not always compatible with the Asante kinship, kingship, and clan systems. In this chapter, I present a brief overview of some aspects of the Asante matrilineal kinship system which apply to my own research. Then I will present each of these aspects in more depth to show how the kinship system, coupled with present economic and political conditions, encourages cross-gender discord and how that affects an individual's economic and life-style choices.

The Akan are a matrilineal people; biological descent is reckoned through the maternal bloodline. As Rattray noted ". . . the Ashanti system of tracing descent is matrilineal and matripotestal, that is, clan descent is traced through the female, and authority in the family lies mainly in the hands of the mother's brother, the matrilineal uncle" (1969, P. 77). The lineage is not a female solidarity group but a group which, in the formal domain, is dominated by men (Bleek, 1987; Sanday, 1974). As Obbo observed, "while women may have some advantages in certain types of matrilineal systems, there is still no doubt about the political dominance of men" (1980, P. 2). Although the lineage supports their members over members of other lineages, women can be caught between two 'male dominated' loyalty groups (Bleek, 1987), the one they are born into, and the other they marry into.

It was abundantly evident in my own research that men do wield the greater portion of power in Bonwire. Of the numerous offices and positions of power an individual might aspire to in the village, such as political leader (Chief, lesser Chieftaincies, Sub-Chiefs, Linguists), moral leader (elder, master weaver), and family leader (lineage head, household head), there is only one position reserved for women, that of Queen Mother. Women, through their own economic efforts, may become heads of households, but the other positions are closed to them. The Queen Mother has a position which is considered to be the equivalent of the village Chief, but her area of control and concern pertains to the affairs of women and children. The present Queen Mother is a very able, and much respected, advocate on behalf of the village women, and has a considerable influence on the Chief, however, her jurisdiction ends outside of Bonwire and its people. She, like the Chief and Sub-Chiefs, has a voice in the higher Asante council; hers is through the Paramount Queen Mother, the Asantehema, while theirs is either directly or indirectly through the Paramount Chief, the Asantehene.

Poewe (1981), in her study of matrilineal kinship ideology, has defined six different gender interaction patterns using three major variables (ideology, interests, and economic behaviour) and two values (sexual differentiation and non-differentiation). According to her table, the Asante would fall into her fourth category, sexual- parallelism. ". . . their values goals and interests are distinct . . . each sex independently owns and manages largely separate and distinct resources in order to achieve valued ends" (Poewe, 1981, p. 22). One of the most striking aspects of gender relations in the Asante kinship system is the degree to which spouses keep their economic affairs separate and hidden from each other. This is largely due to the distrust they have, firstly, towards the other's lineage, and secondly, of each other. The following statement illustrates a common view men have of the "unfairness" with which women treat their husbands when dealing with family expenditures.

> *If the woman has money and the man needs money she won't help him. The majority won't help. The men don't want the woman* [the wives] *to know how much money he has. Women are always greedy. If you have money and they have money, they always want you to spend yours.* (Nana Ampem)

Women do contribute to the economic well-being of their family through both paid and un-paid labour, however, their contribution in the paid sector can contribute to marriage instability (Cutrufelli, 1988). Both women and men may express the desire to further the well being of their children, but both have responsibilities to their own lineage which can be in direct conflict to the obligations they have to each other, and in the case of fathers, to their children.

The Asante Kinship System

> In the belief system of the Ashanti, blood (mogya) was the vital force which, transmitted from generation to generation, bound the living and the dead together in a web of kinship (abusua). (Wilks, 1988, P. 118)

In the Twi language, there is no term or descriptor to denote the conjugal or nuclear family (Bleek, 1987). The word abusua[17], often translated as "family", refers to the matrilineal descent group. The abusua (see Figure 4.3) is the most significant social group; as a permanent and fundamental institution, it permeates every aspect of life for the Asante. Its members form a unified group, sharing rights and responsibilities relating to people and property. "The lineage disposes of dead members, the head supervising the rites. Beliefs about life after death among the lineage ancestors indicate its spiritual continuity" (Bleek, 1987, p. 139).

In the Asante kinship system, every child is born into the mother's abusua (lineage) and is a citizen of the chiefdom to which that lineage is entitled (Fortes, 1950). The Asante trace their ancestry through the abusua, blood passed on by and through the female which cannot be transmitted by the male, united by mogya (blood). Children belong to their father's ntoro[18], a spiritual rather than a physical link. The ntoro is the spirit transmitted by and through the male (Sarpong, 1977) and the spiritual relationship between the paternal ancestors and their descendants (Braffi, 1992; Sarpong, 1977). People are said to derive their personality or character from 'bathing' in the stream or waters of their father's Nton (Braffi, 1992). The children then are said to have the blood of the mother and the spirit of the father. As Lystad writes: "It is through the bodies of women that family, lineage, and clan membership is determined, but it is through the bodies and minds of men that great things are achieved" (1968, p. 64).

Relationships and Inheritance

Loyalty to the matriclan supersedes ties to the conjugal family even in inheritance. Bleek (1987) notes that marriage is of secondary importance among the Akan. This is not to say that marriage is unimportant; on the contrary, it is very important, especially to attain adult status. However, marriages can and are terminated freely if they interfere with the matrilineage. Children born outside of marriage are not considered illegitimate as they are full members of their mother's lineage. In a study conducted during the seventies among the Kwahu (another of the Akan groups and closely related to the Asante) Bleek examined the often tense relationship between conjugal family and matrilineage. He points out that lineage and conjugal family are in a kind of competition with each other particularly over matters of loyalty and inheritance.

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[17] The word 'abusua' is understood to mean the extended family, leading from one's ancestors down to one's descendants.

[18] The ntoro appears to be the spiritual equivalent of a 'patrilineage' since it is traced through the father and is a connection with the paternal ancestors.

In Asante traditional law, the right of inheritance is accorded only to the matrilineage members; male members take precedence over female members (Fortes, 1950). A man's children do not traditionally inherit; rather, his nephews and younger brothers inherit. This is to keep family possessions and titles in the matrilineage. Children do inherit from their mothers but:

> Matrilineal principles operate against the inheritance of cocoa land by daughters, even if the land was bought and worked by their mothers: sons inherit the cash crop-producing land and daughters are relegated to the subsistence sphere. (Brydon & Chant, 1989, p. 84).

Provision has been made in Ghanaian law for individuals to make wills and go against traditional inheritance, but the matrilineage members exert pressure on individual members not to do so. Spouses keep their financial affairs separate to avoid the difficulties which can arise between matrilineages on the death of one or the other.

Asante kinship is an arrangement of opposing relationships. Fortes explains it thus: "Men have greater political power than women; but political status comes from lineage affiliation which is conferred by women, and this redresses the balance" (1950, p. 270). Children may have affectionate relationships with both parents. But, while the social relations they can access through their fathers are by choice, the social relations through their mothers are obligatory and are often burdensome. "As members of a lineage, they try to advance the interests of their lineage; as members of a conjugal family, they fight the interests of the lineage to which they don't belong" (Bleek, 1987, p.139). As Fortes (1950) has examined these relationships in some detail, I will briefly describe his findings by category.

Perhaps the most important relationship in Asante kinship is that between siblings. Older siblings are responsible for helping their younger siblings; the younger siblings must defer to the older ones. The first born in particular is expected to take care of and direct the behaviour of the other children. There is more informality in the behaviour of siblings towards each other, and more trust in sibling interaction than in any other Asante relationship, including marriage. Same sex siblings, particularly women, often share the parenting of each other's children; the children call the maternal aunt, mother.

During my field work, it was quite confusing at first when I was told "this is my mother (or sister, or brother, etc.)" because the indicated person was often too young to be the parent. Later, I would ask: "Is she the woman who gave birth to you?" or "Were you born of the same mother?". Sisters include all your mother's sister's daughters as well as all your father's female children. In fact, all the females in your matrilineage, of your generation, are your sisters. Your grandfather's granddaughters are your cousins since they belong to a different lineage.

The relationship between brother and sister is a very important one, but also the one that causes the greatest problem for a man's conjugal family. The sibling tie shows its strength primarily in opposition to other ties.

> A brother has legal power over his sister's children because he is her nearest male equivalent and legal power is invested in males. A sister has claims on her brother because she is his female equivalent and the only source of the continuity of his descent line. (Fortes, 1950, p. 274).

Fortes further points out that men are thus in conflict on whether it is more important to have children themselves or for their sisters to have children. "Most men conclude that sad as it may be to die childless, a good citizen's first anxiety is for his lineage to survive" (1950, p. 75). A male needs a fertile sister so he can have someone to inherit (Sarpong, 1991).

I observed, on numerous occasions, the consideration men felt towards their sisters. He would discipline her children, bring her food items, and watch that no one cheated her. She would cook the food for him, iron his shirts, prepare bath water for him. Men trust their sisters more than they trust their wives. For instance, men who work abroad will send money to their sisters to distribute to various family members, because if a wife is not trustworthy, his matrilineage will suffer. If a sister is not trust worthy, at least she will promote his matrilineage, even at the expense of his children. He can also trust his sister to keep secrets of the heart, and may use her as a go-between with his girlfriends (Fortes, 1950). Tradition dictates that a brother has the greater responsibility to his sister's children, therefore women will side with their brothers against their husbands. The connections to their brothers are permanent while the connection with a husband is uncertain. He may decide to take another wife or leave her for another woman. It is also common for men to neglect their conjugal families to pursue studies or work abroad.

The relationship between brother and sister, however, is not without tension. In the matrilineal kinship system there is ". . . an element of potential strain in the fact that the sister is a tabooed sexual object for her brother, while at the same time her sexual and reproductive activities are a matter of interest to him" (Schneider, 1961, p. 13). Because every man's sister is also another man's wife, brothers are careful about the extent of their control over their sisters. He must distance himself from her, and therefore, much of a brother's authority over his sister is transferred to her husband when she marries. However, he retains authority over his sister's children, and thus creates a dependence relationship with his sister.

The traditional dependence of a sister on her brother may be burdensome to the man who wants to live in the style of the modern nuclear family, ie. residing with one wife and their children. Young, educated men, in particular, are exploring the idea of placing the conjugal family above the matrilineage. Further, men who marry outside of their Akan culture cannot expect their spouse's extended family to assist in raising his children. As mixed marriages become more common, the movement towards nuclear families will be stronger. With the breakdown of traditional systems, more women are put in the position of raising their children without the help of either their husbands or their brothers.

Fortes's (1950) research shows that traditionally, the survival of the man's lineage depends on his sister having daughters. However, the sister must also produce an heir for her brother and present him with a nephew. The relationship between the man and his nephew can be complicated at best, and fraught with danger, at worst. For the nephew is waiting to inherit, and if his uncle lives to an advanced age, he himself may be quite old before he can inherit. The uncle's children may also put pressure on their father for assistance, and the nephew may feel that his rightful inheritance is being misspent. The behaviour of the inheriting nephew, on the other hand, is under scrutiny from his uncle to make sure he is deserving of becoming the head of the family. If a chieftaincy is involved, the scrutiny has an even broader base as the extended lineage is involved. The Asante saying **wofase eye dom** (that a sister's son is his mother's brother's enemy) addresses the difficulty of this relationship (Fortes, 1950).

An Asante father has a unique relationship with his children. A child derives its physical being from the mother but receives its spirit from the father. The three related concepts of traditional fatherhood, sunsum, kra[19], and ntoro, are evidence of the importance of fatherhood, for without progeny, a man cannot perpetuate his own father's, and father's father's spiritual essence, nor can his own be perpetuated without sons and grandsons (Rattray, 1923, 1927; Fortes, 1950). Widespread Christianity has diminished, to some extent, the importance of the identification of, and the rituals involved with, one's father's ntoro[20]. Traditionally, children would perform the religious rituals at the place which is associated with the father's ntoro. Each ntoro appears to be affiliated with a particular god (obosom) of a particular river or lake (Fortes, 1950). However, men will generally acknowledge their children, if only to have someone to perpetuate their memories and names. If a man refuses to name his child, then the child's maternal uncle will name it and accept paternal responsibility for it (Fortes, 1950). The children belong to their mother's lineage and are under the stewardship of their mother's brother. And yet, through the father's right to name his children, he can keep the names, and thus the memory[21], of his own ancestors alive (Sarpong, 1991; Fortes, 1950).

Fortes' research reveals that fathers, traditionally, have no legal authority over their children. However, they do have a considerable moral obligation, particularly to their sons. Ideally, children spend at least part of their childhood residing with their fathers. As well, fathers should clothe and share in the feeding of the child, and, provide sons with the means to make a living. Fathers are also responsible for moral and civic training of the sons in preparation for the sons to take up leadership positions in the family and the community.

My own research confirmed what Fortes found in 1950: that fathers were expected to share substantially in raising their children, however, there are probably fewer fathers now who adequately fulfil these responsibilities. Many young people, both male and female, complained that their fathers had morally abandoned them. This was often the case when the father had remarried and had another family on whom he was spending his money. One young man said that he was no better than an orphan since his father no longer even 'saw' him. His mother could not afford his schooling so he had little prospect of 'making something of himself'. This is particularly difficult for sons since their father should be assisting them to acquire a trade. At present, federal government guidelines state that fathers are responsible for school costs for their children of both sexes, however, mothers are often the sole support of their children and therefore many children are inadequately schooled (Brydon & Chant, 1989). In Bonwire, a weaver has set up his own weaving school to teach those boys whose fathers had either abandoned them or were for some other reason unable to teach their sons how to weave. I met a 13 year old boy in Kumasi who had not attended school for several years because when his father abandoned his mother, he also abandoned him. He was selling confections which his chronically ill mother made and earning less money per day than it took to feed the two of them. As a result, he often went hungry.

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[19] The sunsum refers to the personality conceptualized as a personal soul; kra is the spirit, source of life and destiny (Fortes, 1950, p. 266).

[20] Each local ntoro division has its sacred day for the ritual purification of the kra of its adherents, specific totemic taboos, a distinctive form of response to a greeting from any of its members, and a number of names which are commonly though not exclusively found among its members. It is also believed that each ntoro goes with a particular type of character which its adherents are prone to have. The ntoro concept thus gives expression through ritual beliefs and sanctions, through etiquette and through names, to the value attached to paternity. Women as well as men are bound to honour paternity. A woman does so by honouring her husbands ntoro taboos during pregnancy and nursing. If she does not, the child suffers injury through the anger and hostility of the father's ntoro. The ntoro concept emphasizes, in particular, the bonds of father and son which give continuity to the male side of family and kinship relationships. (Fortes, 1950, p. 267).

[21] During my field work, I came across a man who had named one of his daughters after a Queen Mother because he believed she had come as the spirit of her dead ancestor who had been a Queen mother.

> Tradition emphasises the father's importance and his responsibilities and yet at the same time undermines his position. There can be no doubt, however, that in spite of some paternal role rhetoric, the cultural tradition tends to marginalise fathers with respect to their conjugal families (Bleek, 1987, p. 144).

Even though the fathers are marginalized, the focus in family affairs may lie with brothers or uncles. Bleek contrasts this with the historical, pre cash-crop and pre-colonial model where men probably supplied stable and regular support to their children, to the colonial and later cocoa industry models where men were contributing a substantial economic support during the 1970's to the present where economic downturn has resulted in women bearing the brunt of the expense in raising the children.

The girl child is in the unique position of having the lowest status in Asante culture, but because she is a future mother, she is also of great importance to her lineage. On the other hand, a male child's importance is not as a progenitor to his lineage, but as the strength and support of its young and female members. The boy's status grows with age, and even after death, if he has sired children, he will have power as an ancestor. A woman's status declines in old age.

The Marriage Role

As in all African societies, the Akan believe that the primary function of all human beings is to procreate (Cutrufelli, 1988). The expectation is for women to contribute new members for their matrilineage, and for men to ensure that their ancestors will be remembered. Reproduction is a means of replacing the ancestors; an adult's reproductive success is, in fact, so significant that unmarried men are considered irresponsible (Dolphyne, 1995) and men dying without issue are taboo (Cutrufelli, 1988). Women without children are pitied or suspected of being witches or prostitutes (Bleek, 1987). Adult status is not fully achieved unless one is married and/or has produced children. Women are thought to be incomplete if they have no children. Therefore, marriage is very important (Vellenga, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991). Marriage is so important in fact that ". . . adulthood is not determined by age, but by marital status" (Sarpong, 1974, p. 34). A married teenager is considered an adult but a 60 year old who has never married or produced children is not even considered to be an adult. Dolphyne describes it thus: the emphasis is not on the two individuals involved but on the uniting of families for procreation and lineage ties.

Marriage confers a high degree of respectability on the individual similar to that of higher education, professional status, and economic independence (Dolphyne, 1991). The Ghanaian government recognises three distinct forms of marriage, two of which are common to the Akan: 1). Customary (also known as traditional) - a man may have as many wives as he can support. While in the past this could number as many as a hundred, in contemporary times this is rarely more than two to four. This is still the most common form of marriage in all non-Moslem culture groups. 2). Moslem - up to four wives. 3). Ordinance - only one wife at a time; equivalent to the Western model. This is also known as a Christian marriage, but because of the bilateral inheritance laws is not very popular with Ghanaian men regardless of kinship pattern.

While Christian churches forbid plural marriages, it is estimated that up to 94% of marriages are not 'ordinance' marriages (Lystad, 1968). The practice of polygamy and keeping girlfriends and mistresses is also widespread (Brydon & Chant, 1989). Women often don't object to polygynous marriages because it lightens their workload; men like it because the fruits of the women's labours make him richer (Lystad, 1968). While men are supposed to be able to support each wife and her children, they often give very little financial support after the initial investment capital (Vellenga, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991). According to Lystad's

(1968) findings, husbands are not expected to be faithful. If, however, the wife takes another lover and the husband finds out, he can demand payment from the lover to compensate him for trespassing on his property.

Hill (1975) notes that West African marriage bears very little resemblance to European style marriage. Everything from social activities, household economy, ceremonial life, companionship, and eating is separated by gender so that spouses are seldom even seen to be walking together, much less working together. Companionate marriage, depending on the attachment of spouses to each other rather than to kinsmen, is not at all common; socializing and recreation is customarily segregated by sex and spouses seldom go out together except to church (Peil, 1975).

A country-wide social survey in Ghana showed that 91% of all adult females were or had been married while only 65% of men had. Males married much later in life; 15% of men and 74% (84% of the Asante) of women were or had been married between the ages of 15 and 24 (Gaisie, 1975). Divorce is easy and frequent and is likely to befall anyone at least once or twice (Bleek, 1987). Akan women have a high level of marital instability; "... the conjugal bond is relatively weak and easily broken" (Peil, 1975, p. 85). Lineage stability comes before marriage stability - security is found in the lineage rather than in marriage except in the case of a well-to-do spouse:

> . . . there is nothing which can be obtained uniquely through marriage: sex, having children, bringing them up, earning a living, belonging to a social group - nothing belongs exclusively to marriage. Advantages one might expect from marriage, such as loving companionship, romance, shared parenthood and financial support, are seldom realised. (Bleek, 1987, p. 141)

Bleek mentions that young people are becoming increasingly disenchanted with marriage for the following two reasons. The relative financial contributions of men to their marriages has "decreased over the last few decades with the worsening of the general economic situation" (1987, p. 142); women, therefore, profit less from marriage and men find it more difficult to satisfy women's demands in marriage.

Relationships tend to be tenuous at best and strained or non-existent between a man and his conjugal family as opposed to his relationship with his matrikin. Most divorces are because of failure to have children (Lystad, 1968). The following Ghanaian songs illustrate both the shame of infertility, and the blame put on women for failing in what is essentially womanhood.

Look, woman,
At the barren woman
Alas, alas!
The childless woman
Look, oh, look
At the childless woman
He who knew you once
No longer knows you
You a barren woman
Look, oh, look
At the childless woman

Ah, this womb of mine
Is the cause of my fall
And brought dishonour on me
Yes, this womb of mine
Is the cause of my fall

Two popular songs from Ghana, (Cutrufelli, 1988, p. 133)

In one sample of women interviewed in southern Ghana, over two-thirds of women were divorced at least once (Staudt, 1981).

> In the past, a woman married for economic security, and she would put up with infidelity and with other forms of cruelty on the part of her husband as long as he provided for her and her children. Now that women are becoming economically independent, they have other expectations in marriage, the major ones being affection and companionship. (Dolphyne, 1995, p. 19)

Some researchers have reported that in the 1870's, it was observed that women and men were considered equal although gender determined role in society (Wilks, 1988). Whereas this suggests a political equality between genders, I found that gender bias permeates all aspects of the matrilineal system. What is said to be the philosophy of 'equal but different', translates to inequality in the modern world (and I suggest historically as well, although the matrilineal system probably worked to a greater degree of satisfaction for both genders in the past). Men have a political voice that is much larger than women's voice. They have opportunity for economic well-being that shifts in favour of men beginning from the primary grades and even before. Boys are taught a trade which brings in monetary renumeration, while girls are taught subsistence activities which feed the family. Development tries to redress this inequality by putting more economic opportunity in the hands of women. But even this, allows men to shirk more responsibility for raising their offspring.

As is the case in all cultures, the Akan have distinctively different expectations for the behaviour of men and women in marriage. While a man may not be the head of his wife's household, he is the head of his wife and expects her to be obedient and respectful of his wishes. The 'unwifely' woman is considered a disgrace to her sex and is resented:

> A good wife is obedient to her husband, faithful, hard-working, helpful, and not quarrelsome. She knows how to restrain her tongue, and does not talk

> to others about confidential matters between her and her husband. She sees to it that all that he wants is forthcoming without his having to ask first, as for example, clean clothes, hot water for baths, and food.
>
> (Sarpong, 1974, p. 69)

The "ideal" does not always work in practice. Men complain that their wives are not giving them the proper respect (obedience). Husbands appear to exert more dominance on their wives earlier in the marriage and less so later on (Peil, 1975; Caldwell, 1968). This is likely due to the fact that young wives have few resources and must depend for more support from their husbands. Women whose economic well-being depends on their husbands' financial contribution to the household, must perforce be more submissive to him than women who are more independent.

In a survey on age gap between spouses, most respondents suggested that it is necessary for the husband to be older than the wife for the wife to respect him. The man is expected to take charge of, 'have control of' his wife and therefore he needs the advantage of age (Caldwell, 1968). A woman who does not play a subordinate role is said to have a 'stronger' soul, like that of a man, and may be accused of sorcery and of being a danger to her community (Lystad, 1968). If a woman contributes substantially to the household, husbands may divorce a wife because of her independence since they have few alternative ways, to sanction their wives (Peil, 1975). " If members of one sex neglect custom and try to adopt the habit of the other sex, feelings of ridicule, anger, and even religious emotion may be aroused" (Sarpong, 1974, p. 66). No husband would do his wife's work.

Oppong, in a study in 1975, compared certain aspects of continuity and change in conjugal relationships between the matrilineal Akan, the patrilineal Ewe, and the bilateral Ga from educated households in Accra. Among the Akan and Ga, spouses typically live separately, with the former residing with matrikin of both sexes, and the latter residing in monosexual households; the Ewe spouses reside together. She found that Akan and Ga husbands were far less likely to help their wives either with child care or with house work than the Ewe husbands did. The Akan men placed less stress on their financial responsibilities as husbands and fathers than the Ewe or Ga did. The Akan cited feelings of insecurity and distrust about matrilineal inheritance and the continuing financial relationships husband's maintain with their matrikin as the reasons for separateness of conjugal finances. Formerly, customary courts dealing with marital disputes, dealt with cases of adultery, now cases tend to consist of women suing their husbands for child support (Oppong & Abu, 1987).

According to Matthiasson, women, although they may have no formal legal rights in the wider society "have a position of power in the domestic sphere and by extension in the wider society because the household is the most important economic unit in the society" (1974, p. 429). The economic rights of wives and children are only rights to maintenance, to medical care and to accommodation if necessary. Because the husband and wife work to enrich different productive units, they have no joint property; "even joint productive effort does not result in joint ownership" (Oppong, 1974, p. 31).

Residence Patterns

The traditional residence for the Asante is a house divided by partitions into smaller units. Traditionally, each house is the home of the descendants of one woman and her daughters. From 40-50% of house holds, in 1950, were headed by women and consisted of the head and her sister, their children and their uterine grandchildren (Fortes, 1950). A male headed household consisted of either a man and his wife or wives and their children (not very common) or the man and his sister and her children and grandchildren (Fortes, 1950). Rural women are just as likely to be the head of a household at some point in their lives now as they were in the past. Women desire to head their own houses so they can be less dependent on a man, regardless of whether that man is a kinsman or a spouse.

Residence patterns are variable in Bonwire. I found the following different arrangements in the women headed homes I visited: two middle-aged sisters with their adult daughters and grandchildren; a widow, her teenaged and adult children and grandchildren; married women with their young children, their adult daughters and their grandchildren. The following are the male headed homes I visited: a man and his sons, adult daughters, and grandchildren; elderly men, their sister(s) and her adult children (both male and female) and her grandchildren; middle-aged men, their mothers and aunts, sisters and the sisters' children. Asante couples have been known to reside together (Bryson, 1981; Bleek, 1987) however, it is not likely unless the couple are well educated, or reside in Kumasi, and even then it is not the preferred arrangement.

Separate residences (each in his/her own matrilineal home) are popular - they allow each spouse to remain in the bosom of his or her own family, with the wife cooking food for her husband and the children carrying the food to his house (Bleek, 1987; Brydon & Chant, 1989; Bryson, 1981; Lystad, 1968; Peil, 1975). Married women will live in the natal home with an elder brother, mother, or uncle as the head of the household, or head their own households; men reside in the natal home as head upon the death of the uncle or they will build their own homes[22] (Brydon & Chant, 1989). Residence arrangements may change during the course of a woman's life.

> Roughly a quarter of a woman's reproductive years after her first marriage are spent living with parents in a variety of marital circumstances. Roughly 40% of those years are spent in the absence of a husband, either because wives do not co-reside with their husbands, or because of marital disruption. The proportion of women divorced, widowed, and separated rises steadily with age, with most of the older women in this group residing away from their parents. Thus residential flexibility both for children and for mothers allows women the possibility of a variety of child-rearing arrangements, but that flexibility grows more limited with time due to the death of parents and spouses and the increased incidence of divorce and polygyny.
>
> (Blanc & Lloyd, 1994, pp. 123-24)

Asante women then are not likely to receive much financial support from their husbands. In fact, they often spend very little time with their husbands, and therefore, may not receive much emotional support either. If a woman needs to call on a man for assistance, she will approach a male from her own matrilineage rather than her husband. This is not to say that a man will not support his children. Because children's residence patterns are fluid and varied, a child will be financially supported in a number of ways over time. The individual child may live with both parents, either parent, or the mother's kin, but a child living with both parents at the same time is the exception rather than the rule (Bleek, 1987). The household in which a child lives will generally supply his meals.

Behaviour

Males and females have very distinct roles in Asante society and there are very different expectations regarding their attitudes and behaviour. Training of children in their respective gender roles begins early. All children are taught to be obedient, to cheerfully and willingly carry out any task set for them by anyone senior to them. Boys are raised to take centre stage as it were; they are aggressive and noisy, dominate their sisters, and in general are considered socially superior. Girls are required to be biddable, hardworking, and quiet (at least when in the company of men). A good girl is cheerful and helpful, not gloomy and quarrelsome (Sarpong, 1991/1977). It was my observation that men generally treat their sons more harshly than their daughters because they don't want the sons to grow up "soft". Men who can afford to pay for it will send their sons to boarding school to prevent them from being influenced too much by women.

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[22] Any individual who builds his or her own home, or inherits the natal home, becomes the head of the household.

Men, on their own, will cook and clean for themselves, however, they will not do so if there is a woman available to do it for them. They don't want their sons to cook and clean. Young boys often help their mothers in food related tasks such as pounding fufu (pounded plantains and yams) (see Figures 4.1, 4.2), but they do so less frequently as they get older.

Whenever an individual steps out of the expected role and behaviour pattern, censure is quick to follow. A young man explains how he learns the gender roles and how it relates to preventing women from weaving.

> *When my father was approached "Why are you not teaching them* [daughters] *to weave?" My father would say he is teaching them farming. They will work at the farms and come back and cook. So they will learn for their husbands when they grow up. So I am learning from my father. My father said "if a woman is involved in this and you marry her, you know, she has to finish her own piece for someone - a customer. She has to be involved with for a set number of days, or whatever they use in making it. She has to be involved in so many things, at the end of the day she will feel even busier. She will be even more busier than you at times. She won't even go to the kitchen. Then who does the cooking? So I am never ever going to marry a woman who does the weaving. I would definitely tell my sister to stop weaving.*
> (Sampson A. , 23)

Thus, a woman should not weave because she has other more important work to do. Furthermore, women who did weave were seen to be shirking their responsibilities and neglecting their husbands.

> *Some of those women that were involved in weaving then, they were not preparing food for their husband like they should. There was this public outcry . . . women were shirking their responsibility of the house. My father said women were then discouraged from weaving, and it is good. Women now have the time to prepare food for their husbands.* (Sampson, 17)

Men have the authority to prevent their wives but not their sisters from engaging in particular jobs. If a wife does not comply the husband himself would face ridicule. Men are required to control their wives; they must see to it that women fulfil their roles.

> *I would advise my sister against it* [weaving] *but I couldn't stop her. I would first advise my wife not to start weaving, but if she insists, she has to choose between weaving and me because I cannot afford to sit in men's circles where men will be discussing your wife's attitude to weaving these days. They will say why do you allow it?*
> (Peter, 18)

> *I would not marry a weaver. If I allow the wife to weave I would be on the wrong way. I would allow my sisters to weave. I will not allow my daughters to weave. As a husband, I will control my wife; so what I like she will have to do. When my wife is sick or travelling, I will have to look after the children and cook, but that is rare.*
> *(Frank, 24)*

In the past, women were more obedient than now. Women's decreasing compliance with gender norms of behaviour is causing considerable anxiety for men. There are a number of factors responsible for this. Women's involvement in income-generating employment, men's inability to provide adequately for their families, and the "modern era" were the reasons given most frequently.

> *In olden days, men were the head of the family. Women's business was looking after the children, going to the farm, and household business. Men used to look after clothing and schooling for kids but no longer. The women help support the men because their income is not enough to cater for the whole family. There are a few men who are rich enough who will not allow the woman to earn money, but in the low and middle income families, the women have to help earn money.*
> (Queen Mother)

> *A woman should not tell a man what to do, but they can discus something and decide together. If a man is rich, the wife will do what he tells her to do, but if there is no money . . . Ghanian marriage is a problem. Ghanaian women who have more money than their husbands show no respect. If you say "Do this", she will say "I have no time to do this". If a woman is independent she has no respect at all, and if she earns more than he does, he would be dependent on her and there would be no respect.*
> (New Kentehene)

Because marriages are not based on love, as such, the relationship between spouces is more vulnerable to outside influence. Furthermore, the success of a relationship hinges on concrete actions as evidence. Women show a man respect if they are satisfied with the relationship. This must be visible to others as well as to their husbands and includes deference, consultation, obedience, and financial assistance when required. Men show their commitment to the relationship by providing for her and their children.

> *Here in Ghana it is not about love, if he has enough money to buy things she wants, than she will love him. If the husband has plenty of money to do everything for the wife, the wife always likes the husband and obeys his instructions. But if the woman*

> *has more money than the man there is no respect at all...we have that idea in our mind, that whenever your wife likes you it is because you have the money to do well for her.* (New Kentehene 39)

> *If your husband doesn't take care of your children, and your children are hungry, you can't listen to him. He can't tell you not to do something. Women who listen to their husbands are ones where the husband provides well. You can't get meat from the farm, you have to get it at the market. So if the man isn't giving you pocket money or housekeeping money. If the man has the means he may be able to stop you, but if he doesn't have the means, he can't stop you.* (Queen Mother)

Ackah (1988) discusses a number of ways that Akan society has of showing their disapproval of "unbecoming" behaviour. Children listen to moral tales (the Ananse stories), their behaviour is ridiculed, they are physically chastised (for example, I watched an older relative slap the hand of a young boy who had reached out his left hand to accept a gift; the left hand must not be used to pass anything to another or to accept something from another person) and their elders set examples of good behaviour.

Adults must contend with religious or supernatural sanctions such as: the sanctions or punishments of the abosum (gods); the powers of suman (charms and talisman) and sasa (spirits of the dead); and the disapproval and punishments of their ancestors. Furthermore, as the behaviour of individuals reflects on their whole lineage, other family members will monitor the behaviour and discipline the individual. "It is not an exaggeration to say that a few families earn the contempt of the community as a result of misdeeds of some of the individual members thereof" (Ackah, 1988, p. 89). Male members of a thief's family may find it difficult to find a wife from a decent family. I myself witnessed the loathing people have for thieves in Kumasi. A suspected thief was stoned to death and stripped in the market place. A number of individuals informed me that their family had no thieves.

Ridicule in a close society is a powerful tool for behaviour modification. People who are ridiculed lose their self-respect and the respect of their associates (Ackah, 1988). The gods are called on to curse the offender with death or illness. The Akwasidae I attended in Bonwire dealt with just such a curse. Even though the one who was cursed professed to be a Christian, his family was willing (albeit reluctantly) to pay 40,000 cedis to have the curse lifted.

Ancestors are said to be continually watching the behaviour of the living. They can send help and protection, or send punishment and misfortune (Ackah, 1988). Deceased ancestors are regarded as "guardians of morality"; their descendents avoid committing any actions of which they (the ancestors) disapproved of when they were living (Ackah, 1988). The disapproval of the ancestors can bring harm to their descendents. It is for this reason that the stools of the ancestors are tended to every 42 days. The ancestors are propitiated with offerings of food and drink (libations).[23]

The single women are more defiant of tradition now. They are, to some extent discarding the view that, "*It is our culture that a wife's head* [boss] *is the husband. So if the wife shows no respect for the husband she has no head; she doesn't exist"* (Madam Akosua, 53). All of the young women whom I interviewed were supportive of women weaving. There is a certain amount of "safety" in challenging male supremacy if you have the support of your peers. Women do act as role models for those who are younger. One young woman described how she started to weave and how much she enjoyed challenging the boys.

> *I started weaving by sitting in the loom after the men were finished. I did not have to work in the kitchen. After awhile, when they saw I could do it, they challenged me to weave in competition with a boy of the same age. I was able to beat some of the boys when I was between 11 and 13 years old. All the women in my house gave me support. I started out of curiosity, then it became a sport when I was challenging these boys. The women who could have been my role models were not given the chance to weave in public. There were no role models as such, but there were women before me who knew how to weave.* (Adwoa)

Older men are more supportive, than younger men are, of women expanding their roles to include non-traditional behaviour. They are more cognizant of both the hardships women face and that the modernizing climate is an opportunity to over throw the most inhibiting cultural beliefs such as male superiority in skill and intelligence. Women have proven themselves to be as able as men whenever they have had the opportunity.

> *I think that God gave the power to men, to name things, to say things, to describe things for the way they want because they were there for men to have control over. I think that even these gods were made by men, in a way, so if there are any traditions or taboos, man made them. But then they wanted to respect these things and to put them into the traditional life of the people, and they thought that men were superior. In our age now, knowledge has spread, and they know now that what men are capable of doing, women can also do. So women should be given the chance to do it. No woman in my family weaves. If a woman in my family was*

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[23] Pouring libations is separate from worshipping in the traditional way. It is about respect, honouring, and communications with the ancestors. Traditional religion has to do with worshipping the traditional gods.

> *interested, I would encourage it.* (Kentehene Nana Gyamfi),

Some older men may also have decided that if their wives have the opportunity to earn more money, then they will have less responsibilities towards her and their children. Young men, who have not yet experienced marriage, likely have a more "idealistic" view; therefore, they want a traditional relationship. There were a number of young men who agreed with the older men, but the majority did not. This following is the more typical view.

> *Women are born to serve their men. And I'm a man and the woman is a woman who belongs to the tradition* [Asante], s*o if she is weaving and you are also weaving who is going to serve us? In the first place she is going to get money at the end of the day and you will also get the same amount of money because you are also weaving. So then who is going to be the master of the house? You have to be in the kitchen when she is weaving. Well I'm talking about this particular town. It depends on kente weaving. They expect it to be solely men's job. If I was to weave with a woman in the house, I* [would] *believe the taboos.* (Isaak, 18)

I will close this chapter with a brief discussion of the importance of food in gender relations. Men and women don't usually eat together (Bleek, 1987; Brydon & Chant, 1989; Bryson, 1981; Lystad, 1968; Peil, 1975). I witnessed men and women eating together on only two occasions; both were under uncommon circumstances, a wedding and a festival. Usually, men will eat with male members of their lineage and women eat with female members. Because food is not served in individual dishes, people will serve themselves from a common bowl by dipping in the right hand. Women do not share a bowl with men because of the taboos surrounding menstruation (Cutrufelli, 1985). Nor are they supposed to prepare food for men when they are menstruating.

A woman's preparation of food for her husband, however, also is a symbolic gesture which confirms the commitment to the marriage. A man is not helpless, he could cook for himself. The wife can show her displeasure to her husband by investing less time and fewer ingredients in his meals. An Asante man has few visible cues to assess how his wives feel about him, therefore the "test" of his wife's affection is an important one.

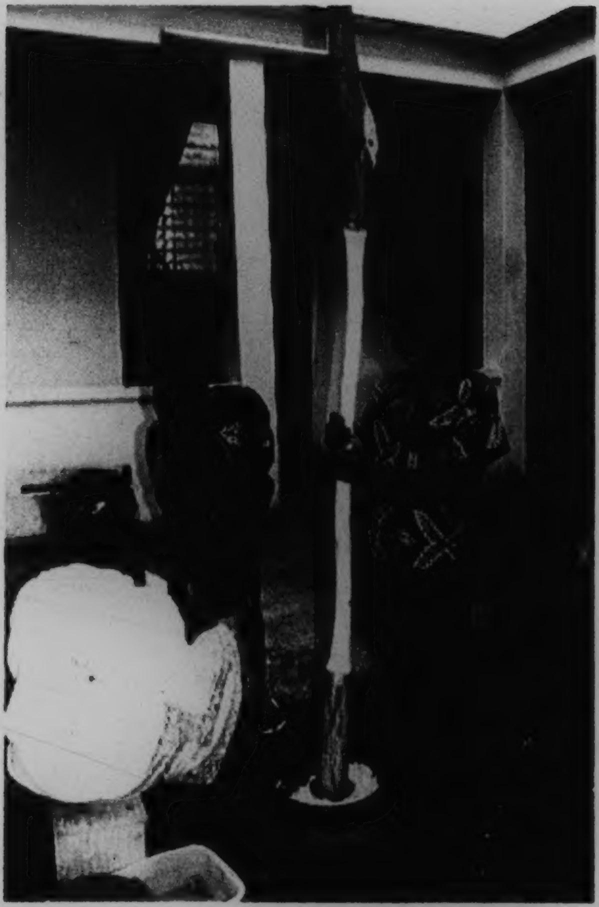

Figure 4.1. Yaa pounding fufu for the evening meal at Theresa's house in Bantama. Photograph by M. Bergen.

Figure 4.2. Boys helping to pound fufu for the evening meal. Photograph by M. Bergen.

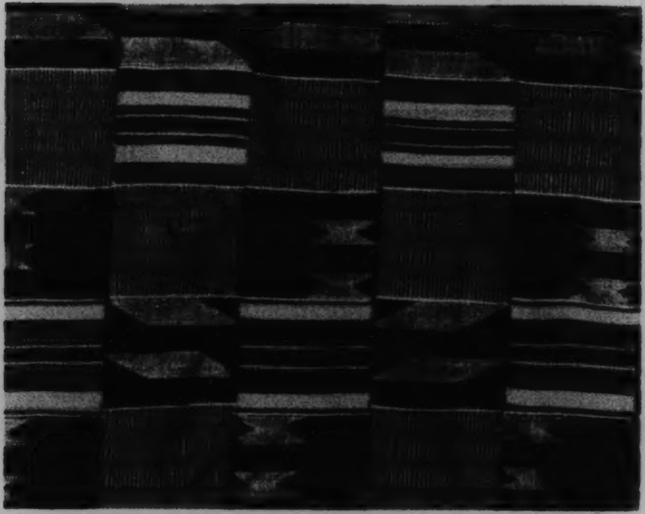

Figure 4. 3. Kente cloth named "Abusuayedom", which refers to the unity of the matrilineage and the extended family. Photograph M. Bergen.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENDER, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

> Women's participation can be a challenge (unless that participation has indigenous precedents, the case in many African societies), and women's accumulation of resources with which to bargain and gain leverage provide other means by which to challenge the system. Yet the goals of participation frequently reflect acceptance of and reinforce the sex division of labour, relieve men and the system of the burden of responsibility, and even serve male interests. (Staudt, 1981, p. 19)

Gender inequality in education in Ghana is pervasive. Statistics bear out the preference, that when resources for education are scarce, female children are less likely than male children to continue education beyond the sixth form. In 1989, 3% of adult males and 57% of adult females were illiterate (Berry, 1995). Government statistics (1990-1991) showed that only 45% of primary pupils were female, 33% of secondary students were female (Berry, 1995), 30% of students in technical school, and only 19% of university students were female (Dolphyne, 1991).

Although the government in Ghana has pushed for equality in education between the sexes, women in Ghana still tend to be less well educated than men are (Dolphyne, 1991; Akuffo, 1987). Education has been free in Ghana since 1960, but, because parents must provide uniforms and textbook fees, they often do not invest the money in a daughter's education (Akuffo, 1987). Research shows that the highest drop-out rate for girls is between the ages of nine and twelve years old (class or form 3-6) when girls are too young to make the decision for themselves (Dolphyne, 1991). Girls are pulled out of school to care for younger siblings, to help the mother trade (see Figure 5.1) in the market, (Dolphyne, 1991; Akuffo, 1987) or because the parents are afraid the girl will become pregnant (Akuffo, 1987). Many girls engage in sexual activity at a very young age and if they become pregnant they are forced to withdraw from school (Dolphyne, 1987; Akuffo, 1987). To redress this imbalance in access to education, the NCWD has been targeting the following three groups for education and training in areas of self-employment and simple technology: rural women and women from poor areas; school-leavers and drop-outs; and working women.

In my own research, I found that the older women I interviewed did not have the opportunity for any formal education, and very few girls and young women were educated past primary school (6th form). The following are typical statements.

I finished 6th form. My brothers were given a higher education. (Aquiah, 18)

> *I never attended school. My mother died when I was young and my father was divorced. When I came to Bonwire I was left alone. I was married off to a man with three other wives. I went into business to support my children.* (Madam Akosua, 53)

In village schools, primary students are educated, for the most part, in the dominant language of the area. If students do not advance to junior secondary (JSS), they are generally limited to trading, farming, or manufacturing small food stuff. Those who complete JSS are fairly proficient in English and may travel to other areas to look for work in the trades or tourism. Girls who complete senior secondary generally go on to become teachers or nurses, or they work for the government in a semi-professional capacity. Only one of the married women I interviewed, who were living (or had lived) in Bonwire, had continued past the primary level. She is a teacher and lives in a neighbouring village.

Of the men I interviewed, all but the very oldest have had some formal education. Generally most men had at least the equivalent[24] of the JSS level and could therefore speak English. The young men and boys were either still in school, or had graduated from JSS. If they had had support to continue on, they would have stopped weaving.

> *I wanted to continue school and go to university and become somebody. So this is my second choice because there was no one here to further my education. It is very expensive. I am supposed to be able to earn some money from weaving to continue school with that. There are so many men doing that. I am also planning to do that. Unfortunately we live on this. I have a small profit to buy this* [yarns] *and use it to make a finished product and sell it and eat from that. It's very difficult. I would be able to support a family with weaving but my wife would have to work too. My wife could be a seamstress if I wanted something close to weaving, then a seamstress will do.* (Kwaku, 23)

The cost of education includes maintenance away from home. If the boy lives in the village, he is assured of a roof over his head, and although he has to pay for food, it is at village prices. If his family cannot contribute to his upkeep in the city, or they do not have a relative there, he must find employment in the city where competition for suitable jobs is fierce.

> *I wanted to continue schooling. That was high in my life, but then nobody helped me to further my education. That's become a norm in the village, a way of life; you finish GSA* [now JSS] *you don't have anywhere to go. Kente is a big business in itself, you just have to learn the skills. So if your father has been kind to you, to invest it in you, the best thing is to just use it. So most people here don't even think of higher education. They think, 'well, I need to know the basics to conduct business. With*

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[24] The school system has changed within the last few years.

> *people who conduct business, with people who come to me, so that I can communicate with them in English or any other language I can* [speak]. *So I have to go to that level, but then I don't need my schooling anymore. So I knew I was going to weave.* (Sampson A., 23)

Most of the older boys (older than 20) were interested to continue with their schooling, however, they were realistic and had resigned themselves to the situation. Many of the younger boys were trying to save money so they could finance further education. They professed a desire for either trade (mason) and technical, or professional (medical) training.

The primary concern for most Ghanaian women from the rural and poor urban areas is employment to earn money to feed and clothe their children. The NCWD has had some degree of success with their employment and technology programs which included such diverse skills and handicrafts as soap-making, oil extraction, bead-making, pottery, and basket weaving. This does not generally bring women into the competitive work force with men, but concentrates on traditional work areas, bringing subsistence agriculturalists into income-generating labour.

Surveys in West Africa (Guyer, 1988; Van de Walle, 1975) showed that a man will give a wife approximately one-fourth of his income to raise their children. This makes up about one-third of the household requirements; women either earn the other two-thirds, or must rely on extended family to make up the short-fall. Some men do not give even this much support.

> *Some men are wicked and don't bother to take part, take responsibility for their children.* [The man who gives] *c500 per day for three children does not even pay for their breakfast. You can take them to court, but often when a man and woman comes from the same village, she doesn't want to* [take him to court]. *Most of the villagers don't know the law.* (Queen Mother)

Van de Walle points out that there is a significant difference in the amount that children contribute to their own upkeep between subsistence areas and modernizing areas. In subsistence areas his tables show that half of all five to nine year olds, not attending school, put out enough labour for their own upkeep (this drops to 21% in school attendees); and 74% of ten to fourteen year old non-students earn their keep (34% of school attendees). The numbers for modernizing areas are considerably lower; 20% and 8% for the first age group, and 46% and 17% for the ten to fourteen year olds.

There are evidently two conclusions that can be drawn from these statistics: 1. It is more costly to raise children in modernizing areas because of higher expectations, more expensive basic goods, and often no access to farmland. As well, children too young for other work may be of more help assisting craftsmen and farmers with small tasks in subsistence areas, and can therefore contribute more to their own upkeep. 2. There are compelling reasons why children are kept out of school in times of economic hardship. As urban workers tend to be better educated, they also tend to have higher-income generating positions and can therefore afford to let their children attend school. Most rural workers are less educated and often work for very low renumeration, and thus are less able to afford to allow their children to remain in school.

A survey (Bleek, 1987) of school students above the primary grades shows that only 70% of fathers contributed to the school fees. Mothers, grandparents, and uncles paid the fees of 30% of the children. Bleek does not indicate but, I suspect that where others paid school fees for the children, those children were mostly girls. Traditionally, a father is expected to provide his sons with training for their future; a father who pays school fees for his sons fulfills that obligation. He does not have an obligation to provide for his daughter's future in the same way. Mothers, who traditionally would prepare daughters for adult life by training them in farming or trading, are not obliged to provide their sons with a livelihood. However, they may feel obligated when the father will not, or cannot. Where the mother spends her scarce resources on her son's education, her daughters may go without.

Where spouses do not live together, as is the case for the Asante, contributions, by the fathers, to the running of the household is minimal or not at all. That is, even where the father does supply schooling, if he pays for no other expenses, the mother may have difficulty providing enough food for her children. If they are in economic difficulties, the need for the children to contribute to their own upkeep then becomes crucial, and even when education fees are paid, the children may attend fewer classes because they are tired or working.

Both parents are reluctant to use scarce resources to invest in the girl child's education (Dolphyne, 1995). She marries at a younger age than her brother, and would thereafter invest her earnings in her own offspring, whereas the brother would likely help out either parent (but especially his mother) for considerably longer before he too will marry.

If there is not the means to send all the children to school, parents will withdraw the girls, particularly in the rural areas. I heard from a number of individuals that it is common for senior school and university students to have abortions so that they are allowed to stay in school. The high rate of pregnancies and abortions is due to the lack of knowledge about birth control and the lack of financial support parents provide for daughters. A determined student will find other ways of funding her studies, such as doing laundry for other students or trading in small commodities.

Women in their 30's have the most children to care for (Blanc & Lloyd, 1994), and therefore need the help of their daughters the most. Daughters (and some sons) up to approximately age 14 are kept home to mind the children while the mother works away from home, either in the market or on the farm.

Ghanaian women are overwhelmingly self-employed (Stichter, 1984), and non-literate adult women gain respect and recognition ". . . from their ability to contribute financially towards the well-being of the family and of the community in which they live" (Dolphyne, 1995, p. 44). Dolphyne emphasizes the importance of education for women to overcome the ignorance that makes women accept inferior positions:

> Spurious beliefs about a woman's subordinate position based on cultural and religious concepts that cannot stand up to close scrutiny, as well as misconceptions about her physiology and her intelligence have made women accept without question the superiority of men. (1995, p. 56)

In a study, in Uganda, on gender relations and how women are viewed by men, and in the press, Obbo (1981) found that educated women were seen as a threat to marriage stability. Educated women would gain a considerable degree of economic independence through work for wages. Working toward self-reliance was "interpreted as a challenge to male juridical supremacy and, therefore, bad for African society. Most men expect the impossible - an educated woman who will blindly obey their wishes and who will stay in the rural areas cultivating food" (Obbo, 1981, p. 9).

My own research revealed that men have feelings of ambiguity about educated women. They have respect and admiration for women who, through their own efforts, are economically successful, whether or not they are educated. Madam Yaa is a 58 year old widow of a weaver. She has raised and educated her six children, three at university level, on her own since her husband died 15 years ago.

> *I have managed kente weavers for 35 years and have developed a very profitable business. I sell 20 pieces a month. My business has supported many people through the years as well as supporting three of my children through college. I myself have*

> *had no schooling. I have gained a lot of respect in the community but am not interested in marrying again. Most widows take care of their children and do not remarry.* (Madam Yaa, 58)

However, most men want wives who are only modestly successful lest they become too independent. The fear of a wife who becomes prosperous is two-pronged; if she is more prosperous than her husband, she would not show him a proper respect and submissiveness and he would then lose control over her actions; he would also lose the respect of other men. Yet, a man would like his sister to be reasonably successful because it would relieve him of having to help support her children. The role of the Asante woman is to some extent ambiguous as well. The subordinate, but somewhat independent woman is the cultural ideal, especially if she is the wife. However, if she is viewed as a member of one's lineage it is preferred that she have greater financial success. Therefore, one man's bold sister is required to become another man's subordinate wife.

Ghanaian men believe that when a woman makes too much money, she no longer gives her husband the respect he deserves (Dolphyne, 1995, p. 74).

> *Women earning money is threatening to men - it will be a problem later because women will become more independent. After my husband died I had no impediments to earning because I didn't have to be home to cook for my husband. I could travel farther to sell [kente cloth].* (Madam Yaa, 58)

The Ghanaian government and the many women's organization see the education of women as a solution both to child poverty and the 'backwardness' of women. "Only education can give women knowledge that would expose the fallacies behind the cultural practices that keep them in subordination" (Dolphyne, 1995, p. 56). It is not that women do not want their daughters educated. It is that women often have too many responsibilities and too few resources to educate their daughters.

Gender and Financial Independence

Beneria's (1981) research emphasizes the separateness of monetary affairs in the African household. As she points out, researchers in Africa cannot assume that the household is one harmonious unit of consumption and production/reproduction. "It is important to distinguish between the household as a collective unit and the individual members that are part of it" (1981, p. 21). According to Hafkin & Bay (1982) African women have varying degrees of economic independence despite social conventions that place them under the authority of fathers, uncles, or husbands. Spouses have separate incomes, with clearly defined financial obligations to their children and their respective lineages. However, women have less access to resources which results in unequal access to political status. This is especially so among matrilineal people like the Asante, where spouses may never reside together for the duration of the marriage.

Mikel faults the combination of the capitalist and the lineage systems as relegating women to an inferior economic position. "The dynamics of the capitalist system in combination with structural principals within lineage systems tend to produce a situation detrimental to women's economic autonomy at points of economic crisis or resource restriction" (Mikel, 1985, p. 27). She examined the roles Akan women had in the economy prior, during, and post colonial, especially in regards to the cocoa industry and land ownership. The Asante and other Akan people created a bureaucracy during the 1700's in response to European economic and political threats. This centralized organisation created new patricentric offices which could be inherited from the father and shifted some of the traditional matrilineal control outside of the abusua (Mikel, 1985; Arhin, 1983; McCaskie, 1983).

A further shift in male - female relationships to the lineage occurred prior to 1900 through the intrusion of the western capitalist economy in the rubber tapping industry. While both sexes were involved in the rubber industry, men retained all their earnings as in the capitalist mode, women had to share their earnings with the matrilineage. This in turn led to males using their earnings to purchase property for cocoa farms (Mikel, 1985) which were generally inherited by brothers and sons to the exclusion of sisters and daughters. "Men rather than women appeared to be breaking free of the abusua (lineage) property relationship and acquiring personal property in farmland which was distinct from abusua land (p. 16).

Akan lineality and filiation principals played in women's decreasing access to agricultural land. Early in the century, daughters and sisters inherited cocoa land according to the custom except when an heir was not designated prior to the death of the owner. Then the farms reverted back to the matrilineage and thus to brothers. Men preferred to leave their farms to their younger brothers (as opposed to nephews who may have been to young to manage) to keep the farms in their matrilineage. In mid-century, in response to a drop in cocoa prices, women tended to avoid naming an heir early because they needed the income from the land. As a result women often died intestate, and the land reverted to their brothers. Later still, because their sons were often not inheriting from either the father (matrikin inheritance principal excludes sons) or the uncle (not until all their mother's brothers had died), women actually named their sons as heirs. Thus, within a few generations, very little land was left in the hands of women. Women continued to be an important labour component in maintaining the farms and harvesting the cocoa , however, they no longer were working for themselves.

Most village women now are subsistence farmers. That is, they farm firstly to feed themselves and their families. If there is land to grow extra produce, or they have abundant crops, they will sell the surplus to brokers or market women for cash. Women work hard on the farms, rising early to walk to the farm, and then spending a large part of every day preparing meals for their husbands and children (Lystad, 1968). Even with a great deal of diligence and hard work, farm women's access to capital to either increase their holdings or build up a business is slim (Staudt, 1981).

> *I am the head of this household. There are only females here and children here. I support 16 people for food and pay half the school fees for the school-age children. My sons of weaving age live with their father and do not contribute to my household. I have been a part-time manager of kente weavers for 10 years and farm for food. People buy on credit so I don't do a great volume of business.* (Madam Akosua, 53)

The day I interviewed her, as the children were eating their noon meal and she was peeling yams for the evening meal, Madam Akosua had already walked to the farm twice, a total of 10 miles, to cultivate her crops. After cooking the meal, she would bathe the children, wash the laundry and the dishes and cook one more meal before she could go to bed. The next day she would repeat this cycle.

Traditionally, a husband should give a new wife capital with which she is expected to start an income-generating activity so she can provide for her own and her children's needs (Dolphyne, 1995). I was told that women are expected to supply their children's basic food staples as well as their own and one meal a day for the husband. The husband should supply the meat or fish and some condiments (peppers, salt, etc.). The husband is also responsible for one cloth or outfit per year for his wife, clothes for his children, and their school fees. In farming communities, the woman works both her own farm (where she uses the income from surplus produce to provide for herself and her children) and her husband's farm (Dolphyne, 1995; Lystad, 1968).

Obbo's (1980) research, revealed that 33% of all households were headed by women. In her study, she examined the particulars of family responsibilities and economic control and found that with a capitalist mode of production, matrifocal families (blood-related women and their unmarried children) are found to be marginal to the economic structure. The men in these cases are semi-skilled, unemployed or underemployed and tend to have abandoned the family. The women in Obbo's study expressed the desire for power, wealth and status, and stated that their goals created tension and conflict between the sexes. Men considered that women who had the same goals as men were uncontrollable. "The need to control women has always been part of male success in African societies" (Obbo, 1980, p. 5). Women often pushed the boundaries of traditional gender ideology to create options for themselves and employed strategies such as hard work, manipulation, and migration in an effort to support their children.

Due to inflation, it is increasingly difficult for women to support themselves and their children through subsistence agriculture. Many women take on other renumerative work to supplement their income. This puts an increasingly greater burden on women. Female children, therefore, often have to pick up the slack. Women who earn more disposable income, become evermore independent. Peil (1975) emphasizes that the relationship between a woman's income and her marital independence is not a direct one. Her income level relative to her husband's income, and how she uses her money, appear to be more important than the fact of her employment.

> . . . a woman's power position relative to her husband's is directly related to her contribution to household expenses. Where the woman makes a substantial contribution relative to her husband's there is a greater chance that decisions are reached democratically; where the wife makes little or no contribution (because she has no income or is unwilling to use it for household expenses), the husband usually makes decisions autocratically. The same is true whenever the husband is considerably older than his wife or has considerably more educational or occupational status than she does, but economic contributions seem to be most important. (p. 82)

A woman in a polygamous marriage has more time for trade and work because she shares the duties of cooking and washing for her husband with his other wives (Dolphyne, 1995). As my research revealed, widows generally do not remarry so that they also will have more time to work to support their children. In matrilineal societies women will not invest their money with their husbands to purchase joint property lest on his death his matrikin will inherit or what she has helped him earn will be split with his other wives (Dolphyne, 1995; Bryson, 1981). The Akan inheritance custom prefers inheritance of a man's estate by matrikin over wives and children except in Christian marriage (Bryson, 1981).

Regardless of the style of marriage, women are concerned with keeping their property separate from their husband's property. Couples seldom pool their money, though they may do so for the benefit of their children for particular occasions (Bleek, 1987). In fact, both men and women try to keep their spouse from knowing the extent of their incomes. This gives women a measure of security, for if her husband thinks she has money, he may cut back on his contribution when he is suffering from a financial shortage. Men, on the other hand, do not like to have their wives privy to their spending habits, particularly on other women, because they fear her jealousy.

Women and Work

The right to perform certain tasks or jobs in most societies is mediated more by a social construction of gender than the physical ability to perform a given task. In West Africa, researchers have shown that rigid gender division of labour is a prominent feature of all craft production (Anderson, 1990; Aronson, 1993). Craft producers are generally accorded specific status positions, within their communities, which are both relevant to the type of craft they are engaged in and their own degree of competency in production (Lamb & Holmes, 1980; Poynor, 1980).

The traditional division of labour has important consequences for gender relations. Women and men work apart in separate locals, and therefore, are not involved in the informal sharing of work experience. This is, in fact, a system of non-competition between men and women. More important than the differences between gender roles and activities is the fact that the specialised activities of men and women are essentially complementary (Smedley, 1974). This is not to say that the work is valued equally at present, although it may have been valued so in the past. In Bonwire, the women who farm (a subsistence activity) free up the men for weaving, an income generating activity.

Hill (1975) found that among the Akan, food crops are mainly cultivated by wives, however it was explained to her by the elderly Adontenhene of Akwapim that in traditional Akan culture "men are attached to the land, they own it and clear it; the women are attached to the food, they grow it, process it, cook it, and sell it" (p. 121). This has not in effect changed that much. Women's concerns are still with the food; men are concerned with who will prepare their meals. It is precisely this reason men give in explaining why too much independence in a wife is seen as bad for the marriage; a wife may stop preparing the food for him.

Women in the villages are generally employed in agriculture or the craft sector. Service sector employment, such as hair plaiting, housekeeping, sewing, and prostitution, is generally found only in the towns (Peil, 1975). Girls between the ages of eight and fifteen are employed as housemaids and child minders (see Figure 5.4). They are usually village girls from poor families who cannot send them to school , and in some instances may not even be able to feed them. Staudt's work shows that "Indeed, women's very participation in agricultural production prevents them from entering the modern education and wage sectors proportional to men" (1981, p. 4).

Women spend most of their income on household needs and often have to make up the deficiencies or shortfall in what their husbands provide for their children (Blanc & Lloyd, 1994; Bryson, 1981). They prefer to work in the informal sector, self-employment and cottage industries (see Figure 5.2, 5.3, 5.5), which are more easily combined with their domestic and maternal roles (Date-Bah, 1983). I may add that these are also the traditional employment roles for Akan women. As long as the husband is contributing to the children's well-being, she will be able to manage within the traditional roles.

Margaret Peil (1975) in examining female roles in west Africa points out that female employment increases rather than decreases with age. Most women marry early and as long as a husband provides well for his family, she will be a traditional wife. However, when faced with economic necessity she will ignore the traditional wifely role. Marital status thus affects labour force participation, both because of the husband's attitudes and performance and because economic activity is seen as more important and more necessary at certain times in her life cycle.

Caldwell (1968) found that in post-independence Ghana, people approved of young men going to the towns and cities for a while, but put pressure on young unmarried women to stay in the villages, lest they become involved in prostitution. Reasons given for men migrating was to earn money and acquire skills. Even today, migrant women are suspected of having engaged in prostitution. Young women are thus pressured by their lineage members to stay in the village where they have little access to education or employment, but where they can preserve their reputations.

Statistics show that in 1960 unemployment was concentrated in the 15-24 year age range (Gaisie, 1975). This is still the case. Young people are overwhelmingly unemployed or under employed. Since women in this age bracket generally have one or more children, while men of the same age are still single, unemployment affects women more negatively. Males of this age may be engaged in higher education or in learning a trade. Women, who have less education are relegated to the lowest paid wage sector or subsistence work.

Village women in Ghana often face a life of unremitting hard work through most of their life cycle. Because girls are prematurely pulled out of the education system, they are not educated to a level where they qualify for technical, professional, or state employment. Daughters of women who work in the market or craft sector will usually learn their mother's jobs and stand some chance of earning an income. Daughters of farm women learn to farm, and at best can hope for a subsistence standard of living. Those parents who can support their daughters through high school level are giving them the means to better their lives.

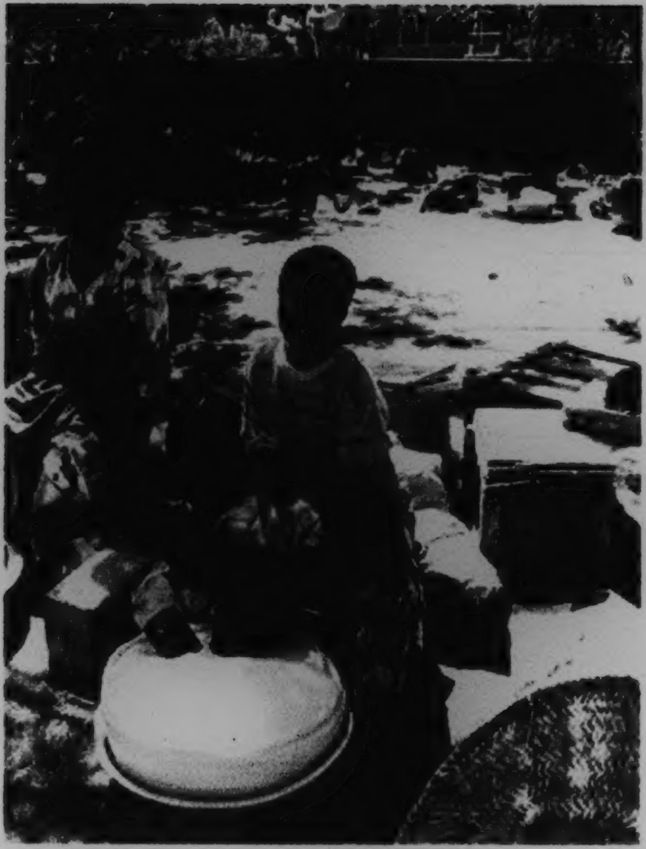

Figure 5.1. Young girl selling gari in the market. If the family cannot afford to send them to school, girls of this age group may be pulled out of school to help their mothers in the market place. Photograph by M. Bergen.

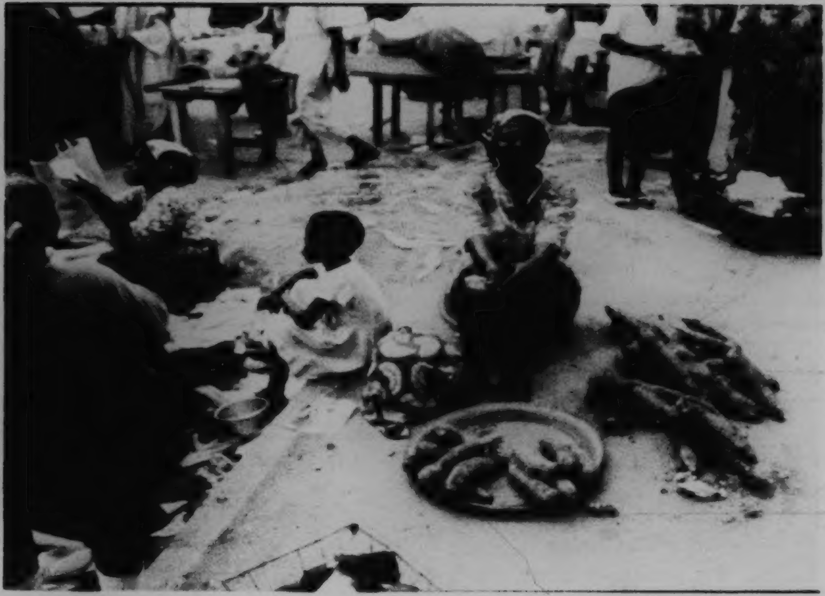

Figure 5.3. Yam seller in with daughter in Kumasi market. Photograph by M. Bergen.

Figure 5.2. Market in Kumasi. Picture by M. Bergen.

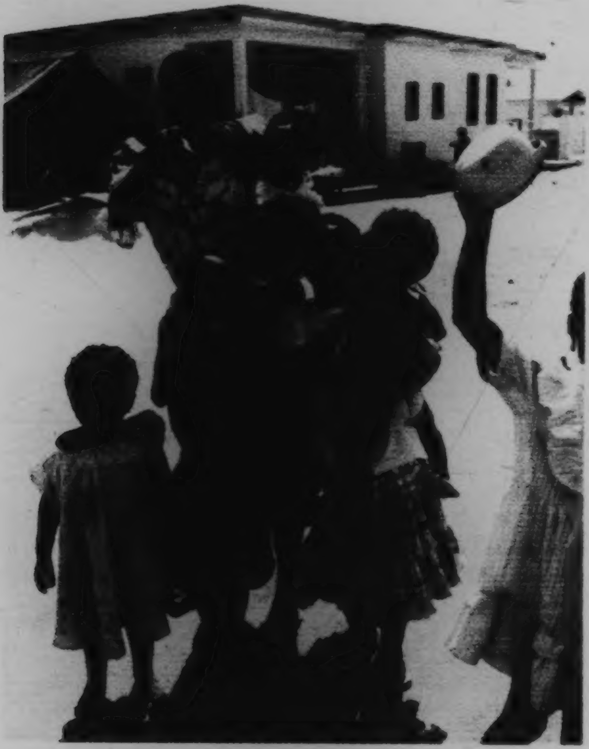

Figure 5.4. Child-minder, Bonwire. Photograph by M. Bergen.

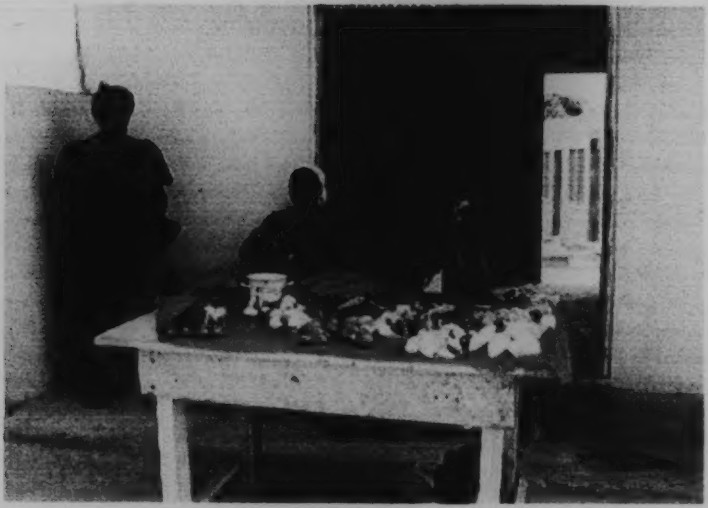

Figure 5.5. Women marketing extra produce in Bonwire. Photograph by M. Bergen.

CHAPTER SIX

KENTE, THE CLOTH OF KINGS

Origins of Kente

Kente, known historically as the cloth of kings, developed some 400 to 500 years ago out of an older tradition of West African narrow-strip weaving (Rattray, 1959; Hale, 1970; Lamb, 1975). There are a number of traditional stories in West Africa of how and where weaving first started and how it came to the Asante (see Hale, 1970; Lamb, 1975; Smith, 1975; Warren, 1975; Johnson, 1979;). These stories are quite similar in everything except the location and identity of the heros. Two men are in the bush (this is considered the realm of the sacred) when they observe a spider (Anansi) weaving a web and thus are inspired to invent weaving (Amenuke, 1968; Smith, 1975; Johnson, 1979). Asante tradition holds that these two men are said to be Kwaku Amey-Yaw and Otaa-Kraban (or Nana Predon). In Bonwire the weavers assert that the lineage which produces the Kentehenes are the direct descendants of these first kente weavers.

Prior to the weaving industry, men in Bonwire were farmers. I was unable to determine whether the women had switched from another occupation to farming when the men took up weaving. I was told that Bonwire has existed as a village for about 400 years so it may well have formed for the sole purpose of housing weavers. At present, Bonwire has no other crafts and is in effect a two industry village: farming for women and weaving for men.

Kente strips[25] are woven on the West African men's horizontal, double heddle loom (see Figure 6.1). The Asante loom is composed of 13 pieces, and the weavers resist any modifications or tampering with any of the loom parts (Browne, 1983; Akuoko, 1996). Some loom parts can be home made, others are commissioned, or purchased in the market, and the weaver will put them together himself (Akuoko, 1996). The long narrow (generally about 4 in. wide) strips have both warp and weft faced sections on a single strip of cloth. The patterns, and the arrangement of patterns, as well as the finished cloths are named with proverbs[26] which reveal the "the thoughts, customs, mores, and beliefs" of the Asante (Smith, 1975:39). According to Mcleod (1981), the colour and design of the cloth one wears is determined by age, status, and gender. Kente cloth is worn by both men and women for ceremonial occasions (see Figure 6.2) and is used to cover the funeral bed (Lamb, 1975).

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[25] Kente is woven in 10cm wide strips usually with cotton warps and rayon or cotton wefts. While other West African cultures also have a narrow-strip weaving tradition, the Asante use more colour and have developed a double weave technique not seen elsewhere. When the strips are sewn together they create a checkerboard pattern reminiscent of basket weave.

The weaving process[27] and tools (see Figure 6.5) have not changed since the 1730's, when Danish factor Ludwig Romer's agent observed weavers in the Ashanti court of Opokuware (Rattray, 1959). The materials used for weaving, however, have undergone a profound change. Where once hand spun cottons and silk threads (when available and affordable) were used, now the dyed yarns, usually cottons and rayons, are imported. The change is quite obvious even to the amateur eye when you compare the colours and thicknesses of yarns. What is not visible is that the use of ready-made yarns has also impacted on women's labour. Traditionally, old women - predominantly post-menopausal - would contribute by picking and spinning the African grown cotton (Rattray, 1959; Hale, 1970:26).

Organization of Kente Weaving

A review of the literature shows that weaving in Ghana is both a high status and a gender specific occupation as well as a financially lucrative enterprise. Long an important industry in the Ashanti province of Ghana, weaving has traditionally been considered a male craft. A number of authors have discussed the organization of weavers, but what may have been true in the past, in some instances, has undergone a considerable amount of change. According to Kwabena Tawiah, the Assemblyman of Bonwire, there are approximately 2,000 males from Bonwire who are able to weave; of these, not all are able to weave the complicated patterns or the double-weave. Those under 18 years of age are still apprenticing (see Figure 6.3). This is not to say that all the weavers are practising their craft in Bonwire. Many have temporarily "travelled out" and cannot weave where they are currently residing. It is difficult, but not impossible, to find the space for a loom in the city.

Arhin (1966) reported that the weavers of Bonwire had formed organizations to

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[26] Lisa Aronson is working on a long term project collecting information on the language of West African textiles. I believe this includes the kente names and proverbs.

[27] See good descriptions of the weaving process in Mcleod, 1981; Lamb, 1975.

"furnish larger capital and so facilitate a quicker production of kente cloth to meet increasing demand" (p. 10). I found no evidence of this type of organization now but when I inquired, was told that the organizations had existed in the past. The Corporation of Kente Weavers had managerial problems and was disbanded ten or 11 years ago. They had come together to acquire materials on credit. to mobilize the weavers, and to search out new markets. Women were involved in this organization, but were not involved in the weaving.

There is periodical talk about becoming more organized, however, there is a high level of distrust of the efficiency of organization and the "cost" or impediment to the enterprising individual. The National Board for Small Scale Industries are encouraging the weavers to organize again. In fact, there is a certain amount of pressure from developmental agencies, and from the tourist industry to organize for better market access but this flies in the face of the desire for autonomy in making production decisions. If start-up monies are offered, however, it is likely that the weavers will form an organization. It is just as likely that it will have little chance of succeeding unless the impetus comes from the weavers themselves. An organization for market access would also impact on the present arrangements whereby some women and men "manage" weavers. The manager purchases the yarns and pays the weavers a set percentage of the retail price of the cloth. Women may have become involved with managing through their historical involvement in controlling the yarn supply. Both women and men now manage weavers, however, men seem to have a monopoly on kente shops.

Although weavers are not organized for purchase of materials or sales, there is one area in which they are organised more formally. Individuals or families do have more formal arrangements with other individuals and families to assist each other when they have commissions which they can't fulfil in the required time.

> *People who have contacts will be approached by buyers and when they have big orders and need extra hands they will call me. People know how many weavers there are at my house and we will get commission. If I have money for yarns I will buy and weave a cloth to sell.* (Mr. Badu)

Lamb (1975) and Harris (1993) indicated that the Bonwirehene is the controller of the Royal weavers and directly responsible to the Asantehene for royal cloths. He regulates the weaving community, is responsible for standards of production and for the behaviour of weavers and their apprentices. I was told by the Queen Mother and the Chiefs of the village that it is the Kentehene who is responsible for all of the above. The Kentehene and selected representatives from six other matrilineages are responsible for weaving the kente of the Asantehene. The Kentehene, Nana Akwasi Gyamfi described his responsibilities:

> *So, if I am the Kente Chief I represent kente here. All the people who weave kente here, they weave in my name. They weave for me traditionally - it is like the lineage of the Asantehene, those who come after me on the matrilineal side. When you trace it on my family, my family goes back to these two men who first discovered weaving, and there has to be a representative of theirs' on earth at all time to see to the kente being woven in the village. I am born to be kente chief. My son can't ever be chief.*
>
> *My job is like a middleman, from the government side, from the Asantehene, and any other person who wants to deal with kente. If anybody is interested in kente, that person would come to me. The government is thinking of making this place a tourist attraction and they will have to deal through me; I represent the village's interests. If there is anything to be said to the weavers it will be told to me and I tell the weavers. I consult with the elders and the chiefs.*
>
> *Recently there was the 25th anniversary Derber, and the Asantehene wore four different cloths of beautiful kente. I am one of the seven people who can weave for the Asantehene. The King will call me to the palace and tell me what designs he wants and the Kente Chief will call the six others and they will weave the kente.*

Boys who are born in Bonwire are said to have all the knowledge needed to know how to weave; all that is needed is some training. Furthermore, men from Bonwire who cannot weave feel shamed that their fathers did not teach them.

> *Weaving is in the village. God blessed the village of Bonwire. Therefore, each male born in the village already knows how to weave. Every male from Bonwire has the right to know and be taught by his father. Unless he is able to weave, he is not a man and is not qualified for a wife. The younger generation want to pursue education instead, but when they come home, they are still encouraged to learn how to weave. They will not allow their sons not to learn weaving. Fathers have to do this for their sons.* (Nana Opanin)

According to the Master Weaver, whose own sons were born in another village, *"While there are others who can learn to weave, only those born in Bonwire can learn to weave well"*. Most of the weavers I met were born in Bonwire. Place of birth other than in Bonwire does not, however, preclude either becoming a weaver or being taught in Bonwire. An Ewe weaver who, for 36 years, has made his home in Bonwire is one of the more innovative and busiest weavers in the village:

> *I was trained as a policeman. When I was recruited I had to wait around for a while. There were weavers around weaving everyday so I went there to weave while I was awaiting. I had learned to weave from my father but after schooling I had not considered weaving as an occupation. The people were amazed at my ability so I decided to take up weaving full time when I realized that weavers made more money than policemen. The other weavers and the people in the service encouraged me to weave. I was then invited to come to Bonwire to weave under Nana Opanin which I did for six years. I then set myself up to weave on my own. I have taught 13 people besides my own children to weave. I have 17 weavers under contract now.*
> (Mr. Cophie)

Researchers have looked at many aspects of textile importance in West Africa, but Dilley's 1984 dissertation, on the Tukolor weavers in Sierra Leone, is the first in-depth documentation of what weaving means to the weaver. Dilley shows how important apprenticeship is in learning a craft, for the apprentice learns, not only the craft, but also the way a weaver in a particular culture views the world. He found that the apprenticeship system, itself a social division of labour, is: "a total expression of economic interdependence, of social identities of its members, and of religious beliefs and conceptions of craft occupations and those who practise them" (1989, p. 183). According to Mr Addai, who demonstrates weaving at the Culture Centre, this was also the case in Bonwire in the past:

> *In the past, when someone wanted to learn how to weave, they would take him to the master weaver and he would have to do domestic chores for him. He would have to wash the master's clothes and clean up the house in addition to learning how to weave. More or less like a houseboy. And they were saying, when a person goes through these things, teaching a person humility, and how to be obedient, and learn how to respond to teaching. That was why they were doing that. Before he would learn to weave, there were other traits he would have gotten from the master weaver. The parents of the boy take some drink and some money to the master weaver, and he then accepts full responsibility for the boy. The boy stays at the master weaver's house and doesn't go back to either of his parents' houses. By the age of 15 he would know. If the boy's father knew how to weave, then the boy could apprentice at home.*

Who trains the boys to weave now? Lamb's interview of an old weaver and former chief of Bonwire revealed that he had been taught as an apprentice under his uncle. She found that most master weavers take on apprentices (1975). This is still the case today, however, weaving was more often learned from the father. From my interviews, I found that weavers had learned to weave most often from the father, then the grandfather, or from an uncle. One man had learned from both his father and grandfather. Age when first engaging in apprenticeship ranges from as young as six in the past to as old as nineteen but is now generally between ten and fifteen.

The basics of weaving can be taught in a few weeks but the length of apprenticeship depends on several factors: the aptitude of the child; the amount of time the child can devote to weaving; the diligence of the child.

> *Weaving is taught slowly. You have to master one step before moving onto others. If you are not very intelligent or adept, it may take a long time before your master (teacher) allows you to move ahead. First you learn the plain cloth, and then move on to simple patterns. This process 'locks' the knowledge in the brain. This is a big investment; they are giving you knowledge incomparable. You have to first 'know' the first stage before you move onto the second stage. To be master of all, you have to be very, very good. There are few people who can boast of this acumen.*
> (Nana Opanin)

Arhin (1966) found that the weavers were among the Ghanaian craftsman who exhibit the qualities of the typical transitional entrepreneur: a great capacity for adaptation to change and the willingness to take risks to respond to changing markets. The kente patterns can be complicated. Almost anyone can weave the plain cloths, but to make weaving worthwhile, you have to be able to weave the more difficult patterns (see Figure 6.6) and do a competent double-weave. The skilled weaver commands a higher price for his commissions.

> *If you know the major patterns, of which there are many, you may be inspired through dreams to invent new ones. When you are endowed with skill and intelligence, through the family blood, you are expected to innovate and discover new patterns. There are thousands of patterns. Now there are innovations in colour. You need not ask permission to use the patterns others invent. There has been a tremendous change in the cloth itself. The yarns were finer. My grandparents also said there were many changes in their time. The new kente is even harder to weave then the old ones. It takes twice as long to weave the new kente (double weave). The old work was a combination of single and double.* (Nana Opanin)

Acquiring this knowledge and skill takes time, so apprenticeships may last many years. "*I learned weaving from my father. My father taught me how to weave. I started when I was six and I stayed with him until I was 19* (Mr. Owusui).

When the apprentice reaches a competent skill level, he will usually receive his own loom. Most of the weavers received their looms from their fathers. The father would save some of the proceeds from selling his son's work, and invest it in a loom. In a few cases it was the grandfather who supplied the loom. Three of the weavers I interviewed, purchased their own looms. One man's father died early; and another young man had no support from his father. An elderly man whose father had cheated him out of a loom had been forced to work for his father without remuneration for many years before he was able to break away and purchase his own loom:

> *I worked for my father even when I felt I was ripe for marriage. My father got all the money. I used a friend's loom to get out from my father and get my own loom. I allowed my children to go to school and they would weave in the evenings and on weekends. I took the money until they were old enough to look after themselves. The money was to raise the children and they could ask me for the money when they needed it. I helped them to get their own looms.* (Nana Kofi, 87)

It is expected that a father will supply the loom and either teach his son to weave or arrange for his apprenticeship. But for those boys whose fathers neither took good care of them nor taught them there is now a weaving school (see Figure 6.4). The fathers may be travelling and the mothers take the responsibility of finding a trade for their sons. One man has purchased looms for the express purpose of teaching these boys. The mothers bring their sons to him and he teaches them for free for three or four months and then pays them when they start to be productive. There were ten looms and I saw at least eight boys under the age of 14 at this weaving school.

Ritual, Gender and Taboo

> In the final analysis, social life is made possible by keeping a delicate balance between falling inward and falling outward. (Murphy, 1987, p. 227)

> All tribal taboos are said to be for the ancestors and infringement of them infuriates them. An examination of the offences will reveal a certain natural gravity and repugnance to moral sense about them. They are tabooed so as to serve as a deterrent against committing them. (Sarpong, 1974:43)

The definition of taboo I use here is: a prohibition against certain behaviour in which the consequences for non-compliance are punishment by the spirits or gods. Taboos, said to be "from the gods", are often unique to a specific society or culture and cannot be changed without consulting the gods or ancestors. They act as boundary markers or rules around a particular practice, knowledge, or resource. Their origins are generally cloaked in myth or religion.

> But whatever their origins, taboos are also embodied, that is to say they become part of the lived experience of specific individuals. And

> hence, if taboos are the rules of society, one can say that society is embodied in the acts and experiences of its members". (Lambek, 1992, p. 248)

Taboos differentiate social categories such as gender, age, class (caste) and occupation. They clearly define who cannot do and where one cannot be. "If the semantic content of the taboo elaborates who or what one is not, it is the practice of the taboo that substantiates who one is" (Lambek, 1992, p. 248). Observance of a taboo is an intentional act, and when one observes the taboo, one defines one's place in that society. Pressure is brought to bear on all members to comply with the taboo, through fear of the consequences if one does not, and thus the taboo is made real and divine.

The literature on weaving rituals and proscription is extensive. Hale points out that ritual is often a very important part of cloth production on the West African narrow-strip loom. There are certain taboos which a weaver must observe.

> Some of the general unwritten rules and regulations concerning weaving which continue today, were that women could never be weavers because their menstrual periods were considered to constitute an interference with the production of the cloth or a cause of undesirable forces which would possibly develop around the cloth (Hale, 1970, p. 26).

Both Rattray (1959) and Hale (1970) state that furthermore, a menstruating woman cannot touch a loom or speak directly to her husband - she must speak to him through a child. Women cannot sit on a weaver's chair or stool, menstruating women must not visit a weaving shed. In fact, there was a strong prohibition against women weaving (Lamb & Holmes,1980; Renne, 1991; Poynor, 1980). Most researchers consider this a way of avoiding a woman's "polluting influence" and thus spoil the weaving (Rattray, 1959). When asked for clarification on the weaving taboo, Akuoko (pers. com., 1996) stated that the reason women were not supposed to weave was that the loom would render them barren. To his knowledge, in the late 1970's, a woman who had not previously had a child, became a weaver and subsequently gave birth.

Current research generally avoids referring to a woman's menses as polluting, however, taboos against menstruating women are still common in other Asante crafts. Herbert's (1993) research shows that women cannot dig clay or make pottery while menstruating because they are then considered to be "hot" and dangerous. They are forbidden to " touch or handle any tools used to make things or to change one sort of thing into another" (1993, p. 226). This is similar to what Lambek's (1992) research of taboo, among Malagasy speakers in Madagascar, revealed; that taboos frame the liminal space but do not compose it. In other words, the time or place of the changing of one object into another is negatively affected by the changing of one state of "being" into another, namely from fertile to infertile. Children, prior to puberty, are only potentially fertile, men are, as it were, perpetually fertile, and women past their menopause are no longer fertile. Thus it is that only the woman of child-bearing age, whose fertility is ever in flux, is faced with the taboo when menstruating, lest she "spoil" the cloth.

> In general, women bear a heavier burden of taboo observance than men, although not markedly so. It is not so much the number or the content of women's taboos that exceeds that of men, as the expectation that they will adhere to them more exactly. It is this adherence - again, practice more than symbolic content - which serves as a mark of gender. Thus it is mothers rather than fathers who are the focus of birth taboos. (Lambek, 1992, p. 254).

Some artists or craftsmen follow rules of excluding the other gender to ensure skill and success in their art. "Men and women often desire to keep their artistic domains separate and it is through taboos and other means of social avoidances that the lines of division are kept intact" (Aronson, 1984, p. 121). This has been the case for weaving, not just in the taboo against weaving but also the rituals which surround it.

Herbert, in her book Iron, Gender, and Power examines gender relations among metal crafters. She sees the taboo, mostly against women of child bearing age, and the elaborate ritual around working with metal, as part of the process of placating the spiritual forces that potentially threaten the craftsman and the craft. She suggests that to understand the control of transformational power that a metal worker practices, "not only that cosmology . . . must be evoked to explain what power is and how it operates, but also that gender and age are critical constituents of cosmology and therefore of any definition of power..." (1993: 2).

Dilley further relates that any craft associated with spirits can be considered potentially dangerous. Weaving "lore" is the means by which weavers can safely practise their craft by nullifying the dangerous aspects of the craft's spiritual association (1989).

Men also have rituals they must observe. Broudy (1979), states that men must guard the loom against insults and evil influences. Libations are poured when a new weaving is started; a white fowl is sacrificed when a new loom is used for the first time. The weaver offers a tiny portion of each finished cloth to a house-mother deity, and he must bid a ritual farewell to his loom when leaving his village.

At present, in Bonwire, few weavers make any special effort to follow the old rituals. Kentehene Nana Akwasi Gyamfi noted the changes which have already occurred in the kente weaving industry.

> *In the very beginning when kente first started, it was made only for kings and chiefs of the people of Ashanti. As an example: What if a woman was sitting in the loom and she all of a sudden menstruates, there is this big dirt that has been smeared over the whole loom and the King's cloth would be spoiled. They were doing this to scare women away from weaving. Kente was not for the ordinary man.*
>
> *The taboos are man-made. The Asantehene's stool* [the office represented by the stool and the stool itself] *is a sacred thing so they had to keep women's menstrual blood away from his things. Because of the western influence, there were revolutions some time back that others wanted to wear kente - so many debates. They did not know before that you could make money from it. There are now men who are appointed to weave the King's kente and they still obey the taboos, like they shouldn't talk to a woman in her menstrual days. Now anybody can buy the kente in this village. We are now allowed to weave for other people*
>
> *The normal things that go on in the palace before they start to weave used to be done here but no more. They kill goats and sheep before, and more importantly, they pour libations before and after the work is done. But before is very, very important. They pour libations to scare away any evil spirits from that environment in which they weave.*

In my conversations with the Master Weaver, he stressed the sacredness of the loom. Not only could loom parts represent danger to the careless weaver, but they could also be used for the most important medicinal purposes, fertility.

> *In olden times, things were so sacred that if you dared to use a discarded piece of loom for firewood, you would die. Something would happen to you that could not be treated medically. If a woman was sick or barren, the loom pulleys could be rinsed in water and the water could be drunk or used for topical medicine, and the woman would give birth.*

The loom was also a danger to women. Careless or defiant women would be punished by taking away their womanhood, the ability to give birth.

> *There are some young girls who like to sit in the loom but they don't even know the dangers. If the breast beam of the loom touches a woman's belly, she will be barren.*
> (Master Weaver)

In traditional belief, spirits reside in nature, in forests, farms, trees, anything made from those trees and in water. Spirits who have gained power, through having a human following, become Gods. People will make sacrifices to these Gods to appease their contrary feelings towards humans. Ancestors, on the other hand, watch their descendants to make sure that they observe the taboos and rituals associated with the Gods. This is done for their protection. Ancestors, wild spirits, and Gods are all capable of punishing transgressors. It is through trial and error that people learned what was allowed and what was forbidden. Sacrifices are made to Gods and spirits; libations are poured to facilitate communication with the ancestors.

The spirit world is considered to be as real as the world of the living. The actions of the living can affect the spirits of the gods and ancestors. Neglect of the spirit world can bring misfortune. Ancestors may be reincarnated in the new born of the lineage; barrenness therefore prevents ancestors from returning to life (Berry, 1995). The Master Weaver explained the basis for the belief in spirits and the consequences of not recognizing their powers.

> *I am a traditionalist. People don't realize that sacredness has a basis for it. The laws are from the Gods. If you think you can fight in the spirit and you are not in the spirit, you will always say things to insult the spirits. Because people don't recognize the necessity of keeping the laws, so much bad happens, suffering and poverty.*
>
> *There is a small river (the ancestors who made this village) running through the village. The first people did not know how they should drink this water, so they gave it to a dog and the dog didn't die. Then they gave the fish from the river to the dog and it died. That is how the villagers learned to drink the water but not eat the fish. There are certain days you can get water from the river. Farm spirits have certain days too, and you stay away on those days.*
>
> *At one time, this was treated with high esteem, considered sacred, but now people don't recognise the old ways. That is why people in Ghana are suffering so much because people don't understand and don't uphold the wishes of the ancestors. If the ancestors continue to want women not to weave, then believe it. Wonderful things happened in Ghana in the past.*

The origins of weaving among the Asante are cloaked in mythological beginnings as are all things associated with spirits. Modern inventions or recently imported technology have no association with spirits, and they obviously have no relationship to the ancestors. Further, Christianity has denounced the traditional spirits and Gods as pagan belief. As most of the people in Bonwire have converted to one of the numerous Christian religions in Ghana, there is a lot of pressure on the villagers to ignore these traditional proscriptions and taboos. For example, *"Women no longer tell people when they are menstruating so you don't know when they can enter. There is no respect for traditional gods* (Nana Kofi).

It takes time to move from polytheism to a belief in one God. Many people in Bonwire have embraced the Christian God, but have not wholly shed themselves of traditional beliefs. A man I met in Kumasi, in an effort to explain the reason for so many religions in Ghana, spoke of the Asante habit of personal tolerance towards the belief systems of others. Because of this tolerance, they did not want to reject any one religion, so they might combine several. It is also likely, that many religions are needed to replace many Gods.

Mr. Owusui explained what happened to these Gods when belief in Christianity replaced the traditional beliefs.

> *Our forefathers were not Christians; they worshipped so many gods. They used taboos to protect themselves from everything they do. Christianity changed everything. In Christianity, there are more things that men and women can do. . . This has an impact on our way of life, our traditions and culture. It has come to stay in Asante. There used to be so many houses and fields where it was not permitted for women to enter if she was in her menstrual days because of the gods in them. Now they can. It was the God who was taking care of them in the village here. They ransacked the place* [of the God] *and they use the place for the Anglican church now. They built the Anglican church there.*

Mr. Owusui is a Christian and practices Christian forms of worship. However, like many others, he cannot discard the traditional beliefs. Christianity probably does not adequately account for all the marvels and vagaries of nature.

> *I believe they were real. The gods are replaced and the taboos must be replaced as well. The gods still exist, especially in the rivers. Some of them were thrown in the rivers and some of them were burned. They are very powerful, if you use them, if you place a curse on someone, it even works faster [than before]. If you go into traditional places like the palaces, you can still feel them, the gods, and you believe. Those who believe in the traditional gods believe in all the taboos.* (Mr. Owusui)

Yaw, a 22 year old boy from the Kentehene lineage is also a believer in the traditional Gods. He talks about the making of a god.

> *You see, humans came on earth before Gods came. So then there Is this question, who brought these Gods? They* [the humans]. *Like so - this is a wood and its going to be a God, they will make it a God. So when they say things and pour libations on*

> *it, or when there is a wood there and they pour libations on it, maybe they kill a fowl and put the blood on it, and they worship it, it eventually becomes a God. So if you have been saying this for ages, and they have been pouring libations on it, it has become a tradition and a way of life for the people, and it obviously has become a taboo in his* [the human's] *eyes so then who are they to make these things work. If there is a god somewhere, it is he who made these gods and it is the same he who set up these rules. So he can not go back and say these rules are no longer in effect.*

Humans then, in taking a spirit and raising it to god level have a responsibility towards that god and the rules that go with it. Yaw relates the creation of gods to the creation of taboos.

> *If a woman sits inside a loom she will be barren. The old men* [the ancestors] *have poured libation on it and therefore it has become taboo. It is virtually from the gods then. There are no taboos from the gods, they cannot speak.*

Thus, taboos are man-made. They are part of what gives spiritual dimension to the god. Taboos don't originate in the gods, but from the interaction humans have with the gods. What Yaw is emphasizing is that what humans create in the name of a god, takes on ontological status, and cannot be easily negated. He points out that there are other taboos which are no longer observed. However, kente weaving deserves a separate status because weaving is the foundation of the village of Bonwire.

> *These particular rules should not be changed. Not about weaving. There were so many rules that have been changed in my lifetime. For instance, palmnut fruits are now brought into the village in a whole bunch instead of separately like before. Formerly, you could not bring whole logs or tied firewood into the village, but now it is allowed. These rules do not bother me. But the weaving rules are the source of subsistence for Bonwire; so they should not allow outsiders to come in, and outside influence of western culture, to change things.*

Endurance of Hand-woven Textile Industry

> During the two world wars and the immediate post war days, imported cloth was scarce and costly. People found it more economical to use the kente cloth which was more durable than the imported cloth and also easier to obtain.
> (Amenuke, 1968, pp. 25-26)

However, by mid-century the kente cloth industry in Ghana was again in decline, especially just prior to Independence (1957) and for a number of years afterward. President Nkrumah promoted kente cloth as "a national and cultural symbol" for use in government ceremonies and in trade fairs; he organized a statewide competition to produce a unique kente cloth to be presented to Queen Elizabeth II during her state visit in 1962 (Amenuke, 1968).

The present government has continued to support the local weaving industries. While President J. J. Rawlings generally wears a northern style smock for everyday while going about the nation's business, he will usually wear kente for the most formal occasions. I was in Ghana during the recent elections (December, 1996) and much was made of President Rawlings, and many of the newly elected members, wearing kente cloth for his inauguration. The First Lady, Mrs Nana Agyemang Rawlings, is known to wear "a bit of kente about her" whenever she appears in public (Ankomah, 1997, p. 40). Indeed, when I met her she was wearing a kente kabba and slit (two-piece dress) as well as a kente strip for a scarf (see figure 6.10).

Kente is relatively costly for local people to purchase (see Figure 6.7), yet it still holds strong traditional values for the Asante. Lamb (1975) found that when individuals died, kente cloth was used on the funeral bed. This is still the case. An elderly man gave me the following account:

> *Apart from the international demand, we use kente a lot. Firstly, we use kente when people die, especially when they are important to the family or the village or the clan. We use it to decorate their room, and even to say goodbye to them, we put a piece* [of kente] *in their coffin. When people are engaged, tradition demands that you bring some cloth for the family, so kente must be part of it. You bring ordinary plain cloths and cloths from other countries but kente must be in it so that the father of the bride has kente for his container* [coffin] *when he has died. When there is a big durbar*[28] *in any of the Ashanti states or villages you have to display kente. It is to signify your richness and the prestige that goes with kente. And everybody has to have at least one kente cloth for their container, so if there are more generations coming they will need more kente. Local demand was enough at one time to feed the village.* (Nana Opanin)

For the Asantehene's 25th Anniversary Durbar, his designated weavers in Bonwire produced three new cloths for him. All chiefs and sub-chiefs who could afford it likely had new kente cloths for the occasion as well. In addition to these, there were kente strips and cloths given to visiting dignitaries. Many Asante families give kente cloth to their daughters at puberty.

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[28] A durbar is a traditional formal, showy reception held by chiefs and kings which their subjects attend enmass as a show of loyalty.

The use of kente has expanded to include many items manufactured particularly for the tourist trade. Additionally, kente designs are now copied in printed and factory woven cloth to be made into a variety of items such as shoes, bags, and fashion dress for export. As Kentehene Nana Ampem Dankwah II put it:

> *We invented this kente for the whole world. There are so many people weaving kente but we invented it first. Others are copying from us. Two of our ancestors, Nana Predon and Nana Amey-yaw, they were farmers; they invented it.*

Kente, as a symbol is used today by many Ghanaian companies. It is on chocolate bar wrappers, displayed in taxi windows and printed on telephone cards.

The changes in kente cloth include many innovations in yarn colours, new patterns, and reinterpretations of old patterns. Yaw illustrates how many of these changes are tourist driven (see Figures 6.8, 6.9).

> *Changes in kente, for example, colours and patterns. It is because of tourists that they have changed. It is our livelihood. Because of the economy, people cannot afford to ignore the tourist market. The availability of new materials and colours has also created a domestic market for new designs, as well as old designs in new colours. Many people cannot afford the more expensive cloths, so this has also created a market for the cheaper simpler cloths.*

Kente cloth has a singular place in Asante history. It is affiliated far and wide with the Asante but is not unique to them. Narrow-strip cloths are also produced in other West African countries but none are as well-known as kente cloth. It has been embraced by the African diaspora; one can find numerous Internet sites set up for the sole purpose of selling graduation scarves to African-American graduates. The resurgence in kente weaving can be attributed in large part to the promotion of it but it also has a strong traditional value. To the non-Ghanaian it is readily identified with Ghana; to the Ghanaian it is quintessentially Asante.

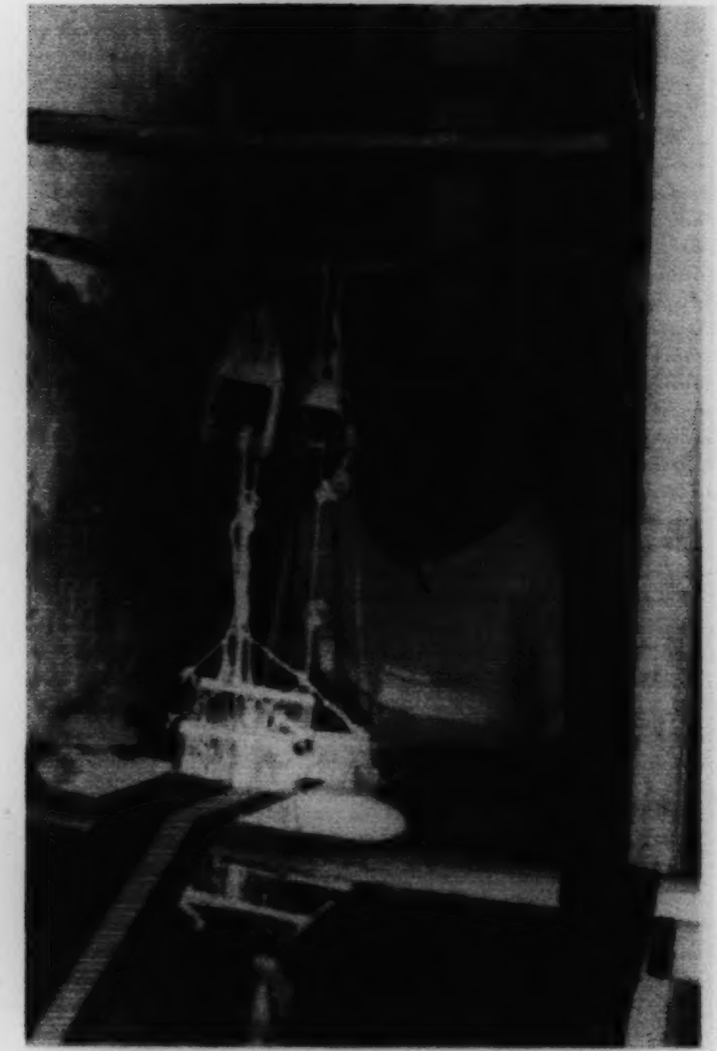


Figure 6.1. Mr. Marfoh at his loom. Note the pulleys, weaving sword, and the two pairs of heddles of the Asante narrow-strip loom. Photograph by M. Bergen.

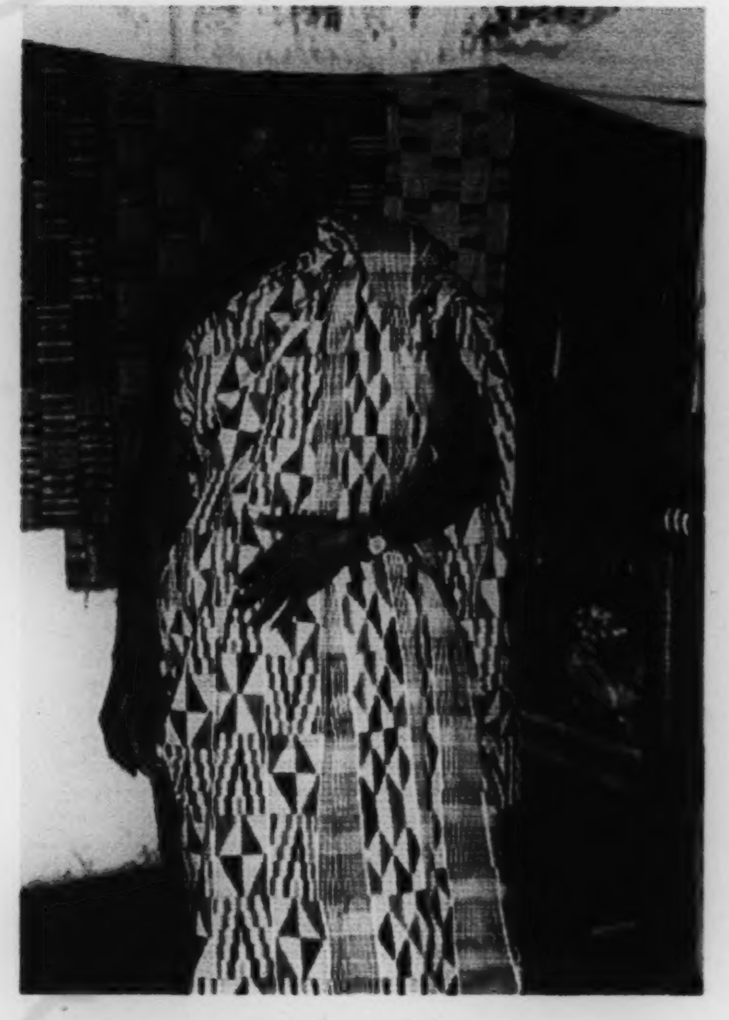


Figure 6.2. Mr. Cophie modeling a kente cloth in his shop in Bonwire. Photograph by M. Bergen.

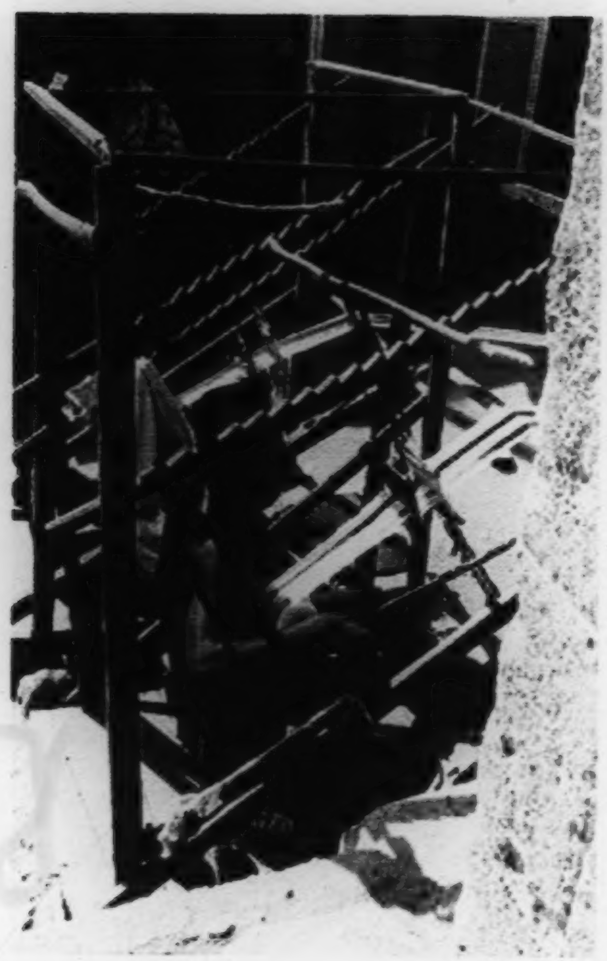


Figure 6.3. Boy learning to weave. Boys may start weaving before the age of ten. Photograph by M. Bergen.

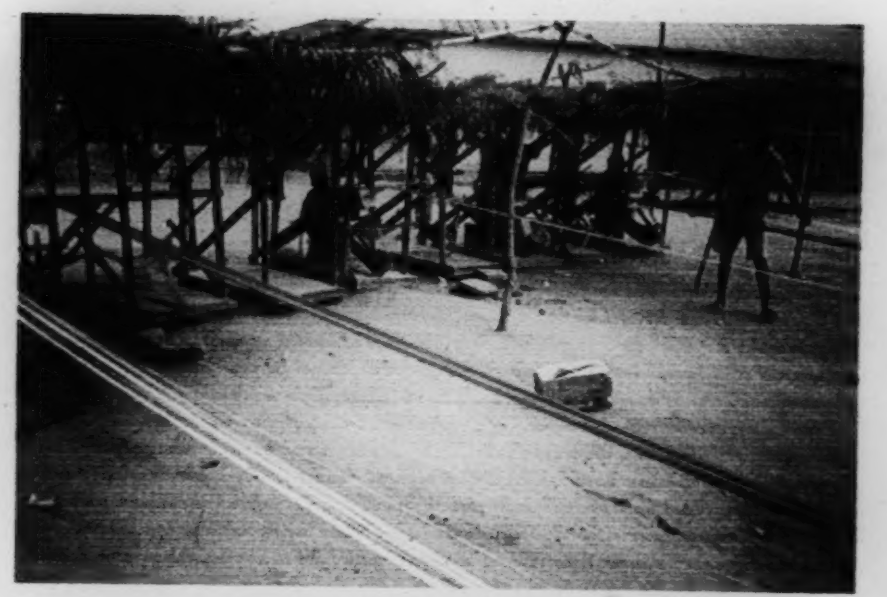


Figure 6.4. Weaving school for boys in Bonwire. Photograph by M. Bergen.

Figure 6.5. Two young men weaving in a sheltered area in Bonwire. Note the toe pulls and the drag weight. Photograph by M. Bergen.

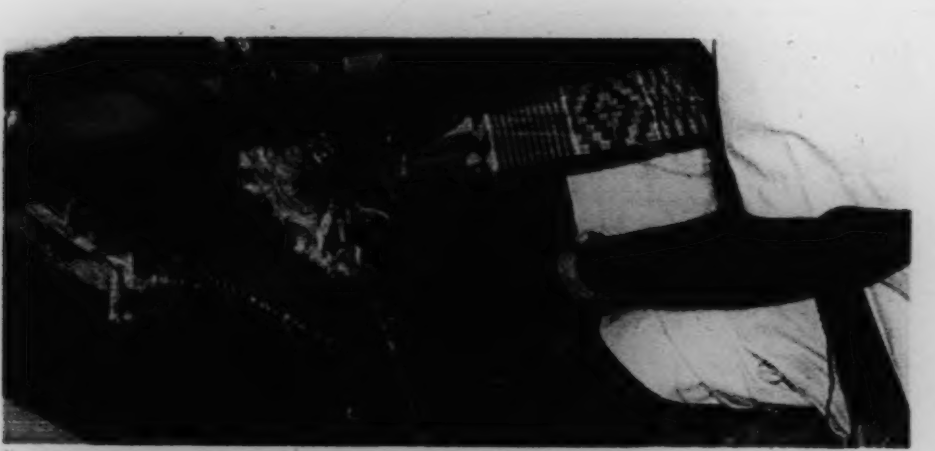


Figure 6.6. Master Weaver of Bonwire weaving the "Brain Upon Brain" kente pattern. This is considered to be the most difficult pattern to weave. One cloth will take him four months to complete. Photograph by M. Bergen.

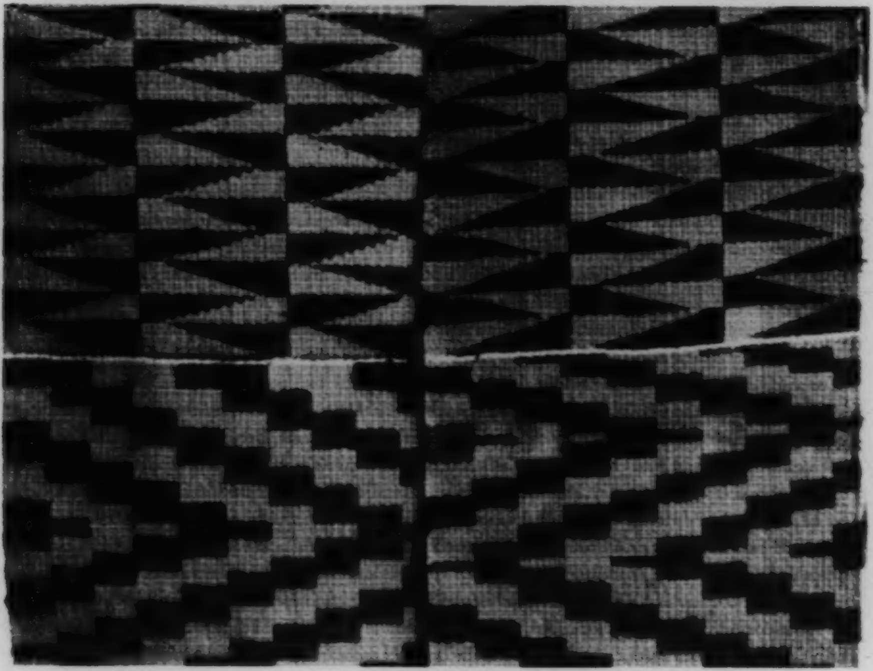
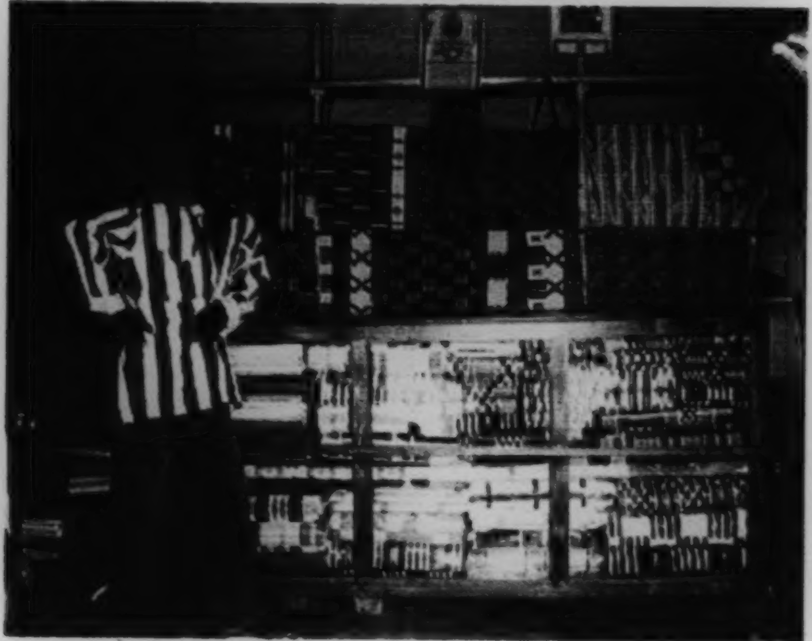


Figure 6.7. Section of "Brain Upon Brain" kente pattern (two strips wide). Photograph by M. Bergen.

Figures 6.8 and 6.9. Kente shops in Bonwire. The merchants sell whole kente cloths, kente strips, shoes, scarves, vests, bags, and hats made of kente cloth or imitation kente. This type of kente marketing is fairly new and is in response to tourist demand. Photographs by M. Bergen.



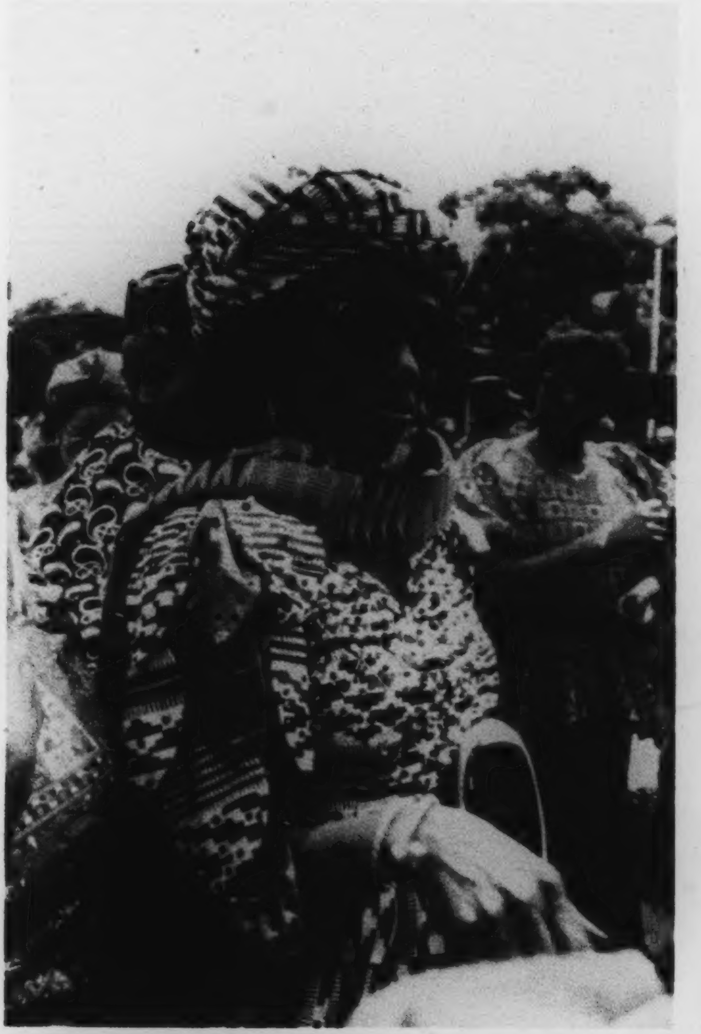


Figure 6.10. Wife of the President of Ghana, Nana Ageyman Rawlings, at a conference in Accra. Note she is wearing a suit made with one kente pattern and a scarf of another pattern. Photograph by M. Bergen.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

> In Ghana children suffer as their mothers cannot earn enough through trade to feed them properly. Women, then must still bear much responsibility for the economic well-being of their families, while they have few resources to enable them to fulfill it" (Robertson, 1984:48).

Introduction

The need for "development and progress" as a solution to the many economic problems in African countries has been articulated and discussed by numerous academics, researchers, the United Nations, and the various groups which administer development funds. If we accept Akande's definition of development as " the process whereby the economy undergoes social and economic transformations geared towards improving the quality of life of its citizens" (1992:61), then we must also accept that the goals of development have not yet been reached. What is clear is that the overall quality of life of most African citizens is not the same as that of most citizens of Europe or North America. However, what is not clear, or agreed on by the various agencies and researchers involved, is how to remedy the situation.

This chapter is intended to show the relationship between gender and development. A brief review of development in Africa is necessary to understand how various policies have affected the 'family' but particularly the impact they have on women. This will be followed by an analysis of development in weaving in Ghana and then, more specifically, Asante women's involvement in weaving.

Theory, Development, and Africa

Numerous theories on the reasons for poverty, the best ways to implement economic reform, and what it is that is necessary to "develop" have been proposed and debated within the African development context. From the time of Colonial withdrawal from Africa, policies have been implemented, found wanting, and then changed to whichever theory fits the newest paradigm. Enormous amounts of financial capital, in the form of "aid" dollars from the West, have been expended for a variety of projects aimed at alleviating perceived hardships in many areas. While many have been successful (particularly those connected with health issues), others have failed to substantially alleviate the problems, or have created new problems. In fact, the quality of life in many Sub-Saharan countries is now worse than it was at the time of Independence (Scott, 1995; Akande, 1992; Hancock, 1989).

Aid programs have failed for various reasons including inappropriate technology, lack of training, lack of attention to the level of experience; lack of future planning, lack of sufficient funding to complete the job, and lack of sincere commitment to a project. Furthermore, development aid has become such a huge business that it requires "projects" to sustain its own bureaucracy whether or not the projects are viable (Hancock, 1989). Scott's (1995) examination of various modernization and dependency theories from a feminist perspective has stressed the need for a thorough analysis of the images and language used when discussing solutions to Africa's problems. Many of the theories were couched in language and images that were gender biased. Moreover, the so-called newer theories, such as Hyden's "soft state" theory on the African economy, is just another version of a modernization theory and suffers from the same problems. It assumes that the source of continued poverty is the African extended kinship system (which he calls an economy of affection) and the solution lies in cultural change, or separation of culture and government (Scott, 1995).

> The economy of affection is guided by the reciprocities and moral imperatives (or, "clan, village, and 'tribe'"), while the state is governed by more rational and less parochial principles. Finally, tradition must be challenged through the discipline of the market, and the slumbering entrepreneurial spirit, stifled by the soft state, should be awakened. (Scott, 1995:15)

The state, constituting the largest single employer, is criticized for creating a body of citizens who are dependent on the state; this very dependency is considered evidence of "backwardness" (read traditional tribalism) and is thought to stifle free market entrepreneurship. This is the thinking that has guided the efforts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to compel Third World governments to implement policy reforms (Structural Adjustment Policies or SAP) such as removal of subsidies, devaluation of currency and deregulation of industry in return for larger loans (Scott, 1995). Although Ghana is considered one of the most successful structural adjustment implementors, it is still a low income country. According to an analysis of the poverty profile based on the Ghana Living Standards survey, it is not expected, given the present growth rate, that extreme poverty will be eradicated in the next half century (Prah, 1995).

SAP has lately come under criticism in Ghana from a number of economists. John Mihevc, head of the Economic and Social Justice project of the Canadian Inter-church Coalition on Africa, at an economics symposium, criticised SAP in Ghana and warned that:

> Churches were obliged to speak out and resist the dangerous values - including individualism and an abandonment of social concern - that went along with the neoliberal doctrine. He said that the values of competitiveness, dominance, indifference and self-interest needed to be replaced by cooperation, solidarity and compassion. (Abbey, 1996)

Ghana needs the assistance of other countries if it is to 'develop', however, ". . . the development assistance provided by Ghana's major bilateral partners is influenced greatly by foreign policy concerns and the development agenda of the governments of these aid agencies" (Prah, 1995:12). For the most part, government aid suffers from a narrowed focus and lack of vision; they often fail to recognise the advantages which are already present in a foreign country. For example, the extended kinship system, whether matrilineal, patrilineal, or bilateral, has acted as a social safety net in Ghana; SAP is seen as one of the reasons that the traditional systems are breaking down. With the break-down of traditional systems, women can be further disadvantaged.

Many critics have noted "the invisibility of women in the formulation of World Bank policies" and few would argue that women "occupy a particular location in the Bank's schema for development in sub-Saharan Africa" (Scott, 1995:71). Furthermore, the World Bank, in a letter to a number of NGO's working in Africa, admitted that the Structural Adjustment Policies "have not been a complete success in Africa and is preparing to investigate how policies in future can better relieve poverty and counteract growing inequity in developing nations" (World Bank, 1996:7)[29]. Agriculture, which in many African countries is the work of women, has been hit particularly hard by structural adjustment policies.

The 1989 World Bank report recognizes that "'modernization' has shifted the balance of advantage against women," (1989:86) in many sectors such as land rights, access to credit, technology, and education. Their recommendations can be viewed "as policies that simultaneously reinforce the capitalist, liberal, and bureaucratic aspects of the African state while at the same time reinforcing, in general, masculine privilege" (Scott, 1995, p. 77). Scott criticizes Bank recommendations of women's engagement in income-generating activity while emphasizing their traditional roles within the household. The costs of structural adjustment are then shifted to the unpaid economy. "Women are called upon to bear the costs of capitalist state policies by generating more income," (Scott, 1995, p. 78) while at the same time, they are expected to continue their nurturing role in the household. Furthermore, she sees the Bank's recommendation of freeing the market and devolving power to the "grass roots" as creating another layer of bureaucracy which shifts more of the burden to women.

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[29] And yet again the World Bank has tied a recent 100 million dollar loan (in Ghana) to the government committing to further economic and financial reforms (Hule, 1998).

> Given that women's "household nurturing" capacities have often remained intact, and that spending on health-care and education have decreased, this bureaucratic dimension of structural adjustment would allow the state to develop new means of control over women's lives while ensuring that they bear a large share of the costs of structural adjustment. (Scott, 1995, p. 80)

Folbre's analysis of the Marxian theory's critique of capitalism offers important insights into the relationship between the process of capitalist development and changes in women's position. "Those who analyse patriarchy as a system but overlook or ignore the logic of capitalism as a system tend to be extremely optimistic about the positive effects of development on women" (1988, p. 258). There is an assumption that capitalist development will weaken patriarchal power, however, some researchers have found that economic development can worsen the relative position of women. Men benefit from a low-wage female labour force and "both occupational segregation and the sexual wage differential reproduce traditional patriarchal inequalities within modern capitalist systems" (Folbre, 1988, p. 258). Furthermore, where women are part of the capitalist economy (wage-earners), men may defer a large portion of expenses to their wives. Single mothers are often left destitute when burdened with the sole support of their children.

The International Women's Year in 1975 launched a decade of investigation and research into issues of gender inequality, poverty, economics, and health of women and children throughout the world. International women's conferences with their initial emphasis on universality and solidarity lent impetus to research on how women could improve conditions by becoming involved in decision-making at the familial, local and national levels. What was soon apparent, however, was the growing split between the desires and expectations of 'western' women and those of their third world counterparts (Dolphyne, 1995; Scott, 1995). While western women were experiencing the ongoing processes of social change which began more than half a century before, third-world women were often at the very beginning of the process of initiating change (Dolphyne, 1995). Dialogue with women, between governments, and with both the contributors and recipients of developmental aid projects kindled innovative and often unique solutions to problems that might be common to many women but were often specific to particular cultures and locations.

Innovative solutions and massive aid projects have failed to substantially alleviate the triple burdens of poverty, economic responsibility, and low literacy levels carried by the women of most sub-Saharan African countries. Bilateral aid often pressures African governments to implement policy changes, and western feminist debate puts pressure on African women to agitate for change. Ghana, the country most often held up as a shining example of peaceful democracy in Africa, is struggling to meet the needs of its burgeoning population while bent under a crippling and increasing debt load. In 1998 alone, the World Bank has loaned the Ghanaian government one hundred million US dollars to overcome "institutional and capacity constraints that have undermined the much progress it has made in setting the parameters for improved macroeconomic performance" (Hule, 1998). The government has made a solid commitment to improving conditions for women and children by implementing laws of protection and inclusion (Dolphyne, 1995), but is relying primarily on international money to finance development projects.

Scott has shown the need to examine women's roles, responsibilities, and their contributions in the African context. Nelson articulates the consequences of not doing so, and suggests the way development can be made more context specific:

> The realities of local life must be understood by development change agents, national and international, who have naive hopes of 'improving the lot' of women. One of these is the nature of relationships of power between men and women. Women as daughters, wives, and mothers may be under the social, if not the legal control, of fathers and husbands. Men may have the ability of preventing any activity which they suspect will undermine their authority over their women. Women's abilities, productivity and autonomy must be promoted in ways which do not threaten men overtly" (1981:6).

The fact that local women's groups are doing much needed research on the needs of women has not yet impacted greatly on governmental multilateral and bilateral aid. However, many of the smaller NGO's (non governmental organizations) are targeting women and "women's" projects for financial support. As research budgets are often minuscule or non-existent in these organizations, the problem becomes one of the best use of funding or "goodness of fit" of projects.

Post Structural Adjustment Development and Women in Ghana

Women in Ghana are burdened both by cultural expectations such as the desirability of large families and their roles in agriculture, and by the economic reality of a cash economy. Leghorn and Parker point out that both colonialism and development have served to affect women's status; even in cultures where women held power and prestige there were "underlying assumptions of women's inferiority that provided the basis for a later acceptance of degrading imported attitudes and behavior towards women" (1981:42). While Queen Mothers have both power and status, and most women tend to gain some higher standing in the community with age, men still relegate women to the background, as protectors of tradition and inheritance, and raisers of children. Women's unpaid contributions are often neglected. Ghana's first woman lawyer, Annie Jiagge, pointed out how these assumptions affect women today:

> Many serious problems bedevil the advancement of women. First on the list perhaps is prejudice against women based on traditional attitudes and customary practices that relegate them to an inferior position in society. Lack of education and professional and technical training is another. . . . Heavy domestic commitments make pursuit of knowledge difficult. . . . Due to tradition, affairs of state, unfortunately, have been reserved to men in Ghana. It is true that Queen mothers have always had a big say in certain aspects of state matters but generally it has been the domain of men, and they are now so well entrenched that the tendency is to carry over this tradition into modern forms of government. [(Jiagge, 1971:13) cited in Leghorn & Parker, 1981:43]

Nonetheless, there is historical evidence of change, although not always to the benefit of women. In a study of the Avatime people of the Volta region in Ghana, Brydon (1985) examined changes in gender ideology. The Avatimes are a traditionally patrilineal farming group who early on (early 1800's) adopted Asante chieftaincy and political structure.

They practised a complementarity of men's and women's work in a non-capitalist society. Power appeared to be shared, to a large extent, if not equally between individual men and women, somewhat evenly through the group. However, the colonial authorities, missionaries and traders never recognized the importance of women's roles and social and political positions, so that by the end of the 19th century, it was men that held effective political power in Avatime.

The imposition of colonial rule and the cash economy was the beginning of many changes. These changes included: premarital childbirth (which is now the norm among working women) and, so as not to illegitimize the children, accommodation within a woman's natal descent group to legitimize the children. Women may be, and are, independent of men; they no longer need marriage to gain adult status (motherhood does that) and their economic roles are no longer bound up with being wives. Economic conditions and out-migration (to seek employment) have changed Avatime marital practice and acquisitions of adult status which in turn are changing the ideology of women's roles. And it would seem that men no longer have the same responsibilities towards their children if they are not recognized as the fathers. Brydon (1985) believes that women's status is doomed to decline under present development policies in either capitalist or socialist political systems. Because of scarcity of wage employment in Avatime, two-thirds of all men and women between the ages of 19 and 34 are working elsewhere in Ghana.

Caldwell (1968) found that in post-independence Ghana, people approved of young men going to the towns and cities for a while, but put pressure on young unmarried women to stay in the villages, lest they become involved in prostitution. Reasons given for men migrating was to earn money and acquire skills. Today, migrant women are suspected of having engaged in prostitution. This relegates most village women to the agricultural sector. Staudt's (1981) work shows that participation in agricultural production prevents women from entering the modern education and wage sectors in the same proportion as men do.

> Women's participation can be a challenge (unless that participation has indigenous precedents, the case in many African societies), and women's accumulation of resources with which to bargain and gain leverage provide other means by which to challenge the system. Yet the goals of participation frequently reflect acceptance of and reinforce the sex division of labour, relieve men and the system of the burden of responsibility, and even serve male interests. (Staudt, 1981:19)

In other words, many of the modernization changes are not to the benefit of women, but work to erode further the power women had traditionally. Women who enter the modern wage sector must move to the urban centres for employment. Here they often lose the support of their female kin for child care and emotional support as well as the ability to feed the family from home-grown produce. Therefore the costs of raising children in the city are higher. The alternative is to engage in income earning work in the village in addition to farming. Either way, the total work, from unpaid and income-generating tasks, of women has increased and has freed up men for education which leads to out migration from the village and women may be left behind to support the children. Independence, therefore, means little if it forces a woman to become the sole financial caregiver while the father takes no responsibility for his offspring.

Blanc and Lloyd report that women in Ghana face a difficult future. Their traditional autonomy is being undermined by the growing importance of the cash economy and their rising aspirations for their children. On the other hand, "children, both their own and those of others, have traditionally been a source of status, strength, and support in an economy in which only 4% of women are employed in the modern cash sector" (1994: 130). Many women between the ages of 40 and 60 are supporting large numbers of children, not all of which are their own. Even when they are freeing up younger relatives (the mothers of some of the children they are caring for) for wage employment, the traditional benefits of higher status in the community are less often realised now. The costs of caring for more children are just too high to be borne by one woman. If the mothers cannot assist, because their own cost of living is too high in the city, then they have to go back to the villages. Women then revert back to agriculture, marketing and small manufacturing of foodstuff and crafts.

As early as 1981, Bernia pointed out that any development scheme must deal with the problem of organizing production so that women are not burdened with a double load. The other activities in women's lives such as subsistence production, child care, cooking, etc. which account for a substantial part of their unrenumerated employment must be recognized as impediments to further education and full wage employment which burden many women, but few men. I would add further, that development schemes, where the organisers are not thoroughly cognizant of the local conditions, such as cost and availability of materials or appropriateness of technology, and gender roles, are often doomed to fail. When I asked several people, both male and female, why were individuals and organizations accepting, and cooperating with, projects which were of no or little benefit to their communities, they answered that if they refused even one project, then the agencies in question might never offer funding again for something which the community needed.

Ghanaian Government Commitment to Women

In 1975, the Government of Ghana demonstrated its commitment to the objective of International Women's Year by setting up the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD). Dolphyne (1987, 1991), a former chair of the NCWD, has researched the activities of this group. Her study shows that the main activities have been research into the lives of women, and based on those findings, making recommendations to the government regarding health, education, employment, family welfare, agriculture and legislation. The NCWD also set up a series of technical workshops to teach women marketable skills.

Government departments and aid organizations have recognized that Ghanaian women have many educational and technological disadvantages compared to men. International governmental organizations like CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) and NGO's have provided funding and technical assistance to the Ghana Assembly of Women (GAW) and the National Council of Women and Development (NCWD) to ensure the implementation of programmes especially aimed at improving the skills of, and conditions for, women (Burton, 1985). There is a focus on women's issues at the national level since 1975 and there are women's organizations in all fields (Dolphyne, 1995).

One of the aims of the various committees set up for examining women's issues for development is "the study of specific areas where women's participation should be initiated or strengthened" (Akande, 1992:61). Research is valuable for identifying the factors, positive or negative, that affect the lives of women, but:

> . . . what the village woman is interested in is to see an improvement in the condition in which she lives. She cannot be expected to appreciate the value to her of the documentation of her particular problems, if there is no indication of possible relief in the foreseeable future" (Dolphyne, 1995:95).

I found this to be the case during my field work. Women often queried me as to why I was doing my research, why I was interested in them, what agency I was working for, and how would they benefit. Women had less patience for questions, than men did, because they felt that enough studies had been done to "know" their plight, now they wanted relief from unemployment, underemployment, and poverty. The NCWD held workshops throughout Ghana to focus on income-generating opportunities or problems for women - an exchange of ideas for value-added products, etc. They tried to promote successful women as role models. They also initiated programs during 1975-1986 to increase women's participation and competence in public life and income earning activities (Dolphyne, 1995). They have given publicity to individuals, and to women's co-operative groups who were successful, to encourage other women to learn from their successes. Through consciousness-raising efforts by NCWD during the UN Decade for Women, girls did take up training in trades formerly reserved for men such as auto-mechanic, plumbing, and radio repair. Publicity about these girls encouraged others (Dolphyne, 1991).

I saw a number of NCWD documentaries on Ghana National Television which featured successful projects, mostly village-based, where women had improved some aspect of their community through entrepreneurship, or through learning a new technology. Other programs were educational in nature; they were concerned with encouraging mothers to keep their girl-children in school, and addressed the health issues of children and pregnant mothers. The Ghanaian government helps to give the NCWD a high profile.

NCWD intervention was quite successful in some areas. Bead making had long been presumed to be a male only craft in Daabaa, a village near Kumasi. The secretary of NCWD was able to persuade men to give up the monopoly on bead making, and successfully encouraged women to take it up. The men, with the help of some incentives, taught the craft to the women. Older women thought there was a taboo against women, but the young women learned the skills of bead making. In fact, they revolutionized the bead making industry by creating new styles and colour combinations (Dolphyne, 1995).

However, not all projects were as successful. For example, a basket weaving training centre was built in the Volta Region, but women preferred to weave at home; a gari-processing[30] project had a number of problems including male interference (Dolphyne, 1995). Co-operative projects often don't work that well in Ghana because women may already have experienced success at working independently and are loathe to give up their independence. Organizers have learned that by involving the women at the beginning of a project, and by requiring an investment (however small) from them, the projects are more likely to succeed (Dolphyne, 1995).

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[30] The making of gari is a very labour intensive process. Cassava (manioc root) is dry roasted and ground to make a coarse cereal resembling semolina.

Many of these development programs did have the added affect that women gained confidence in themselves to get more involved in community affairs and took more control over their own lives (Dolphyne, 1995). This can lead to additional problems since men are uneasy with any economic power shift between genders and especially when women become more independent in their decision making.

NGO's Women and Development

> Even though the world is changing all about them, it seems that women's own attempts to cope with the new situations they find themselves in are regarded as a 'problem' by men, and a betrayal of traditions which are often confused with women's roles. Women must act as mediators between the past and the present, while men see themselves as mediators between the present and the future. (Obbo, 1981:143)

There are numerous international NGO's at work in Ghana. I met workers from Britain, Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and Denmark, whose countries all have long term development schemes based in Ghana. The majority of these are agricultural/forestry (concerned with new methods, higher yielding plants, etc.) or health based. They are generally organized and funded abroad but cooperative in nature. Technical personnel from the donor country work closely with the host technicians, and university students from both countries supply the man-power. Some of the examples are: the guinea worm eradication program; the aids awareness program; rapid growth forestry for sustainable development, and experimentation with higher yielding grain plants.

Another type of International NGO's are the numerous overseas church organizations which collaborate with local churches on short term single projects. These may be solicited from within the local congregation, or the ideas for the project may originate overseas. An example of the latter is the Bonwire Women's Weaving Project which I will discuss later in this chapter.

A third category of NGO is the home-based organization. Most of these are of fairly recent development, and while it may be difficult at times to differentiate the fraudulent ones from the genuine organizations, they work within local communities. Some raise their money through contacts abroad, but they also raise funds for community projects at home.

The Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) is a grass-roots non-governmental organization (NGO) begun in 1983 by a small number of concerned, educated Ghanaians. They provide local communities and individuals with a forum for sharing knowledge (including a teaching and research library in Kumasi), and experience on development issues. In 1994, they added a Women's Forum in the Ashanti Region, which focuses on matters affecting women and provides a network of support for local women workers (Ahenkora & Prempeh, 1995). In addition to monthly meetings, workshops on business, crafts, and proposal writing, CEDEP's Women's Forum are involved in health and wellness clinics. As well as "sensitizing" both men and women to issues affecting women, these organizations are actively involved in matching development projects with international donor agencies. They have provided funding for projects as diverse as training in leadership styles and group dynamics for agricultural cooperatives to start-up money for a commercial bakery and marketing scheme (Amoyaw & Mensah, 1995).

Changes in Weaving

During a time of a slump in the kente weaving industry, in the 1950's (Amenuke, 1968) and again in the 1970's, the Ghanaian textile market was flooded with foreign imitation kente. The factory kente, which was cheaper to produce, was creating wide-spread unemployment among traditional weavers, so the government became very active in promoting the home textile industry. As I mentioned in chapter 3, President Nkrumah and President Rawlings, as well as their wives, made a habit of promoting the genuine kente by wearing it in public. Furthermore, the printed kente did not satisfy the discerning buyer. In an effort to keep the local kente industry alive, the loom technology was examined with an eye towards "speeding up" the process, so that local kente could compete.

The late Professor Lionel Idan, the creative force in the formulation of both the Rural Art and Industry Department at the University of Science and Technology (UST) and the National Culture Centre (NCC) in Kumasi, attempted to implement a number of changes to the Ghanaian weaving industry. The program at the university is research based and meant to improve the local technology, and the NCC was a venue for show casing the local crafts and technology. To that end, he introduced both the European broad loom and his own invention, the boku loom.

In the first project at UST in 1973, weavers were taught to weave on a 100-cm wooden broadloom. It was expected that they would return to their villages to teach others. This, in fact, did not happen. The looms were too costly (20 times the cost of the narrow loom) and the products they made on these looms, tea towels and table napkins, were not readily saleable (Browne, 1983).

Aidoo (1985) reported that the 4-shaft broadloom, weaving on 36[31] to 42 inch width, reduced the overall time of weaving a kente cloth. Asare[32] reported that six yards of 36 inch kente could be woven in 42 hours. It is difficult to compare their findings with the production time on the traditional loom because neither Asare or Aidoo mention the type of pattern woven or the skill of the weaver.

Browne (1983) examined the problems in attempting to "improve" the technology and her research details the reasons why the introduction of the broadloom wasn't successful. First, the advantages of the narrow-strip loom design are well proven by centuries of use, with virtually no change in design. It is an efficient loom.

> The loom is easy and cheap to construct, the loom frame and most of the loom parts can be home-made, the work can be easily dismantled and taken inside when it rains, and the dragstone method is a simple method of achieving tension on the warp. Also, the method of weaving in narrow strips is very flexible. (Browne, 1983:31)

In the second project, at NCC, an attempt was made to duplicate the kente strip design on the broadloom. This method "added nothing in speed to the traditional loom, and it cannot even reproduce some of the more characteristic kente patterns" (Browne, 1983).

The men I interviewed at the Culture Centre who have experience on both the broadloom and the traditional loom said that weaving time was equivalent when weaving strips of regular width (10-cm). However the wider strips on the broadloom were problematic. A simple pattern, with large lengths of plain weave, was faster on the broadloom since one could accomplish several strips with one pass of the shuttle. But the more complicated patterns were a good deal slower, since to maintain the checkerboard appearance of the traditional kente cloth, one had to work the pattern in selected places on the cloth. Furthermore, it was difficult for the weaver to keep the edges even because it was hard to keep equal tension over the larger width of the warp.

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[31] A 36 in. strip would be equivalent to 7 to 9 traditional strips.

[32] This is an unpublished thesis which bears no date of completion.

Johnson suggests that attempts to introduce technical changes in Asante crafts, usually in the name of efficiency and modernity, come from outsiders (at the University of Science and Technology and the National Cultural Centre) who do not understand the consequences of the changes. "Traditional narrow-strip weaving has certain technical advantages: the strips can be woven on a very lightly constructed loom that can be dismantled and taken indoors when it rains, and the simple device of the dragstone can be used, avoiding the tedious and tricky business of winding on warp " (Johnson, 1979:82).

While the broadloom is still being used to weave kente at the Culture Centre for demonstration purposes, narrower widths (double or single) are being woven. Mr. Dapaah, who weaves traditional kente strips (singles) on the broadloom at the Culture Centre and at home, finds the broadloom easier to work on. He learned to weave on the broadloom at the Jachig Training Centre for the Disabled and could not weave on the traditional loom because of his disability.

> *I will roll up about 30 yards of yarn on the loom. The tie-up is easier and there is no need for a sword. You are not so cramped into a small place, not as much bending, and you can stretch easier.* (Mr. Dapaah)

Mr. Addai, a weaver at the Culture Centre, discussed the initial inclusion of Asante women in weaving. Professor Idan was impressed by the Japanese women's production capabilities when he observed women weaving during a trip to Japan. Therefore, he thought that getting women involved in kente production would benefit both the women and the kente industry.

> *The Culture Centre was built in 1976. Women were weaving on the broad loom and the Boku loom. The man from the university taught them. Mr. Idan was a Fante. Most Fante are not weavers. He went to India and Japan and saw women weaving there" They were not weaving on the traditional loom. But now some can. Formerly women were not allowed to weave because it would affect their reproduction, but people challenged the traditions.* (Mr. Addai)

It is likely that because Mr. Idan was not an Asante, and did not come from a weaving culture, he was not concerned with breaking any taboos. In 1974, he trained six women to demonstrate both traditional and broad-loom weaving at the Culture Centre alongside male weavers. Later, more women were taught, one of whom, Mrs. Juantuah who now works in the craft store at the Culture Centre, gave the following account:

> *I learned to weave at culture centre August, 1976. There were ten women originally. Mr. Idan recruited the women. It did not take me long to learn how to weave. I applied and was taught for 3 months and then was paid for it. I made a good living. . . . There were five women who used the boku loom. One of them is now working at the Bonsu Church Clinic.*

The fact of women weaving created much excitement and controversy. When they were featured on national television in Ghana, many people came to observe. According to Mr. Ahmah, Head of Production at NCC), " *They found it fascinating. Indigenous people thought we were violating taboo. They said, because we go to formal school we want to change everything".*

There is a special shed built for weaving demonstrations at the Culture Centre with room for about a dozen weavers. It held a number of traditional and boku looms. The days I visited there, I saw only three men demonstrating weaving in that shed, and two others using broadlooms in another building. When I asked where were the women weavers, I was told that the women were no longer weaving.

> [At the culture centre] *The problem is with their reproductive cycle, when it is time for them to give birth, they leave the work for a long, long time before they come back; and that disturbs their progress. And during their menstrual period they have to stop weaving because it will disturb them. The blood will flow more than normal when they sit on it* [the weaving stool]. *They complain of waist pains. When everything is fine, they weave just like a man* [on the broadloom and boku loom] *and some even faster than some men. The women used to be here, but because of their complaints, we decided to transfer them to other jobs at the centre. They can do other work when they are not menstruating. We did not require women to observe the menstruation taboos.* (Mr. Addai)

Mrs Juantuah disagrees with Mr. Addai about the reasons why women left weaving at the Culture Centre. She did not recall a single incidence of when she had to leave because of her menstrual cycle. However, some women did leave when they married and their husbands did not want their wives on display. Others left for some time when they were in the later stages of pregnancy.

> *I was not worried about barrenness and my menstrual cycle did not interfere with weaving at all. None of the women had problems with it. By the time we were only two women left, we were not comfortable, we felt we couldn't compete with the men so they transferred us to the sewing area and the tourist shop. I stopped weaving 4 years ago* [she stopped in 1992]. *I am too fat now to weave. I had two children while I was weaving. People were happy to see me weave. If I had had the time I would have liked to learn the traditional loom. I know there are women weaving in the North, and maybe at the Jatsie training centre.* (Mrs. Juantuah)

Mr. Idan's initial success with teaching women to weave inspired him to invent the boku[33] loom, which he adapted from the traditional narrow-strip loom. The boku loom (see Figures 7.1, 7.2) operates on a roller releasing mechanism which is hand operated and releases warp when needed in place of the drag weight for the warp. It also uses wooden treadles in place of the traditional toe pulls to change sheds. Because of these changes, the weaver sits on a stool about the height of a regular chair. According to Mrs. Glime, senior lecturer at the College of Arts in Rural Craft and Technology, the advantages of the boku loom are: 1. An economy of space - this loom requires a minimum of 60 by 40 inches of space as opposed to the traditional loom which requires at least 200 in. to stretch the warp. 2. Comfort of the weaver.

> *The weaver on the boku loom enjoys some amount of comfort and does not stretch the backbone and the waist as a weaver on the traditional loom does. There is therefore more output from the weaver on the boku loom than his counterpart on the traditional loom because he does not have to stop for stretching. This is a boon for output as the quality of the product on the boku loom is as high as on the traditional loom.* (Mrs. Glime)

The boku loom was intended to replace the traditional narrow-strip loom, however, it appears to be in use only at the NCC and in the Rural Industries Department at the UST. Mr. Idan intended for both men and women to use the loom. He also invented another loom called the **Bette loom** (compare Figures 7.3, 7.4) which he designed specifically for women. I saw several of the Bette loom frames stored at the NCC, but was unable to determine when last they were used. Perhaps they were used by the women who were trained to weave the narrow kente strips. The Bette loom frame was also adapted from the traditional loom, however, the bars which support the heddles are straight instead of angled.

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[33] Boku is the Japanese word for good.

Weaving on the boku loom, broadloom and the traditional loom is continuing to be taught at the University of Science and Technology. Mr. Boadu, technician at the Department of Rural Art and Industry, reports that there are regular students as well as casual students. There are also work shops set up specifically for non-academics who come only for technical training. Most of his female students are from the Northern Region, where there formerly was no tradition of weaving at all. He thought Asante women may not be interested in learning to weave, or if they are, then they could learn it at home.

In 1993, the Mission of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate set up the Rural Women's Training and Development Centre in the village of Ko in the Upper West Region. The program is especially aimed at girls whose formal school education was terminated at the primary or junior high level. They train females between the ages of 15 and 25 in dressmaking, basketry, catering services, and broadloom weaving as well as informing them on health and pregnancy issues. A number of former students are now earning a living by weaving traditional cloth in their homes (Training, 1996).

The women were reported to have the same problems as their sisters in the Ashanti region: less access to education than their brothers; too little opportunity for wage employment; greater responsibilities at home than their brothers; at risk for unplanned pregnancies due to the high incidence of young, unmarried women involved in informal prostitution[34]. "Most women coming out of school have nothing doing. . . so they resort to indecent lives like running after men, or causing abortions because they can't make ends meet" (Sister Nuurah in Training, 1996:8). I heard numerous individuals make similar comments about young women and their high rate of under-employment in the villages and in the urban centres.

I was told that weaving on the broadloom was also being taught to girls in some primary schools in the urban centres. I heard of at least two other areas where women were weaving. One man in Bonwire reported that he had seen some non-Asante women weaving on the traditional loom in the villages of Agozome and Agblephi in the Volta Region. Unfortunately, I did not have time to investigate this report.

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[34] I use the term "informal" because these women resort to prostitution only when they have exhausted other means of obtaining cash or food, and therefore do not consider themselves as prostitutes.

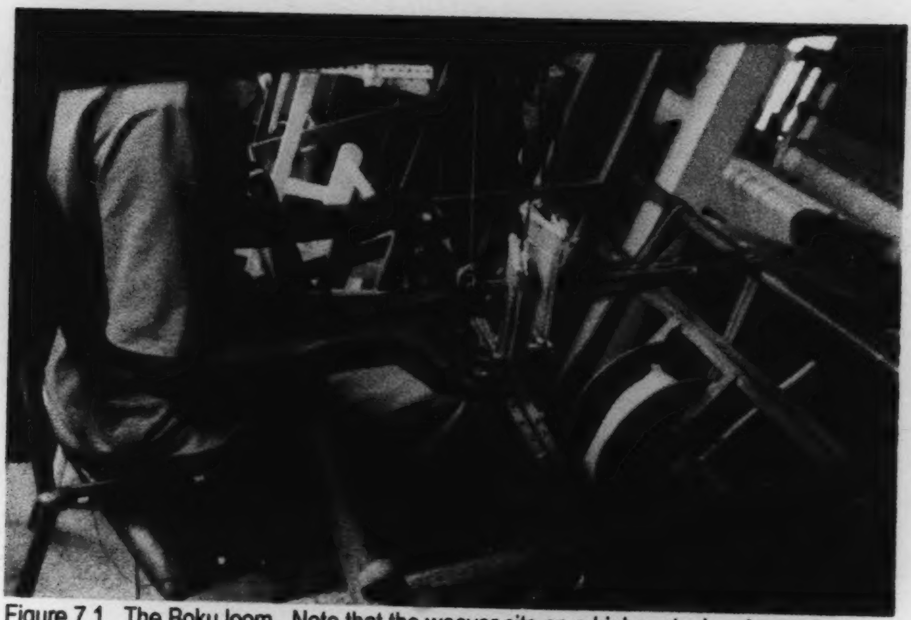

Figure 7.1. The Boku loom. Note that the weaver sits on a higher stool and uses foot pedals to change sheds. Photograph by M. Bergen.

Figure 7.2 (below). The Boku loom: detail of warp tension system. Photograph by M. Bergen.

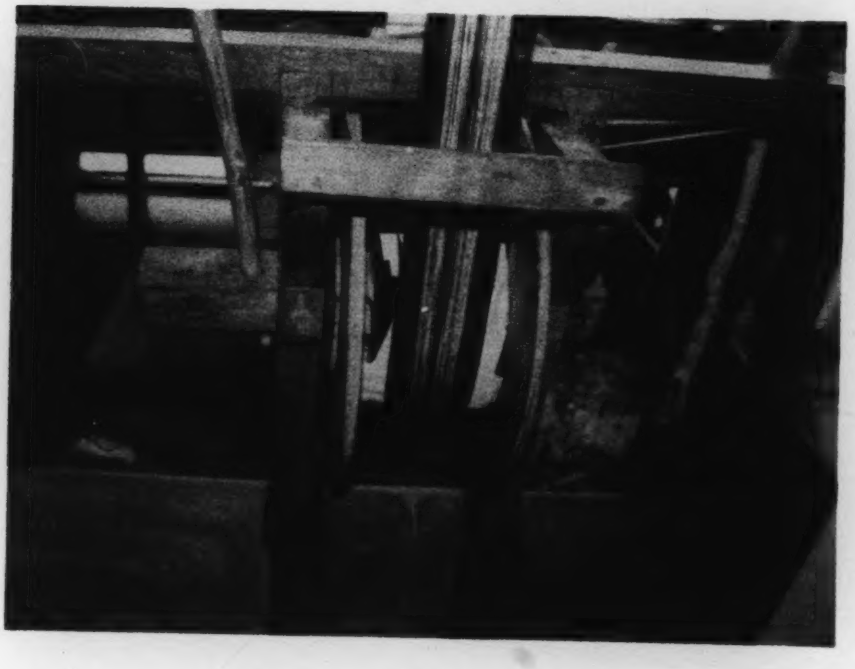

Figure 7.3. The Bette loom. The loom is no longer being used in the Culture Centre. Note the horizontal bars in place of the slope of the Boku loom and the traditional loom.
Figure 7.4 (below). Traditional loom in the Culture Centre, Kumasi. Photographs by M. Bergen.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WOMEN AND WEAVING

> Holistic perspectives of culture with their toe-bone-connected-to-the-foot-bone logic have given way to representations of culture in flux, whose natives may have as much difficulty knowing it and living in it as the field worker. Cultural representations are left open and are subject to debate by field workers and informants alike.
> (Van Maanen, 1988:1270)

The Bonwire Kente Project

When visitors and tourists come to Bonwire, their first reaction is usually to question why women are not weaving here. They are used to seeing women weave in other cultures and other countries. They see the poverty that Asante women have to contend with. The solution seems obvious; if women could only get involved with weaving, then they could compete with men and provide for themselves and their children. If the solution was that easy, Bonwire women would all be weavers. As is, they are involved in managing and girls, as well as boys, are involved in winding bobbins (see Figure 8.2).

In this chapter I will present the two weaving projects for women which have been attempted in Bonwire in the past and discuss the current women's weaving project. Because the heart of my research constitutes the opinions of individuals, I will utilize people's own voices to illustrate the range of opinion surrounding women's weaving, and then in the following chapter will discuss the reasons for the difficulty women have had in becoming weavers.

In 1975-1976, or perhaps a short while prior to then, a tourist came to Bonwire and encouraged women to take up weaving. She came several times and even helped them acquire looms. This was possibly at the time, or shortly thereafter, when Lamb conducted her survey of West-African weaving. No one now remembered the woman's name and none of the village women involved at that time is still in Bonwire.

> *There were women who could weave but they are not around now. There were five of them for about ten years, but they have either gone abroad or to other villages. There were many objections but you couldn't stop them. They owned looms. Some had children. Because fear of the taboos, those who didn't have children were not very active. These women pioneers were encouraged by a white woman who came here before they had thought of it. She was here several times and helped them acquire looms. They could weave of the same quality cloth but could not do the most difficult patterns. They left more than 10 years ago, maybe 15 years ago. They stopped weaving because of travelling out, having babies, or marrying a husband who objects.* (Madam Yaa, 58)

Most interviewees had no recollection of the event although it must have created a certain amount of controversy. This led me to believe that the women who were weaving may have stayed out of the public eye as much as possible. However, I spoke to the brother of one of these original pioneers, and he suggests that the women were such a novelty that outsiders travelled to Bonwire to see for themselves.

> *My sister learned to weave in 1975-76 but she is in London now. My grandmother and grandfather were worried that she* [sister] *would be barren but we told them it is not true. At that time they were not Christians but before she died my grandmother was a Christian and believed what I said was true. She* [sister] *had a lot of attention and people came from all around to see her. My sister was the first* [to weave] *in Bonwire along with two others.* (Mr. Owusaui)

The only other person who had a firm recollection of the early weaving project was the Master weaver. He believes that those women became infertile later. Mr Owusui thought they all had conceived after they left Bonwire.

> *There were three women in Bonwire who learned to weave after they had had children. At first, they were playing with it - when men finished, they would sit in the loom and start weaving. People admired them, but since then they have not been able to have more children. People noticed that and now these women have travelled abroad.* (Master Weaver)

The second weaving project in 1991, began in a similar fashion. There were conflicting statements about who instigated this project, but, I think it quite likely that the initial idea came from a female visitor, and then was taken up by the church. The reason I think it was planned from the outside is that the initial money was spent to build a weaving shed. If the local women had planned the project, they would likely have spent the money for looms and set these up at home. Nonetheless, Mrs. Prempeh from CEDEP was under the impression that the village women had taken up the project with some enthusiasm.

> *The Project was started by the Mother's Union in collaboration with the Anglican women of Bonwire. When we got to know about it here in Kumasi, the building was nearing completion, so we helped with fundraising and also backed with the money that was received from African Palms.* [An organization in the USA that sells palm leaves from Africa for Palm Sunday; the funds are returned to the women in Africa]. (Mrs Prempeh)

The Mother's Union is an organization affiliated with Anglican church women. The money was raised to build a large building which houses approximately 15 - 20 looms (see Figures 8.1, 8.3). The women supplied the labour. A weaver was hired to teach the young women to weave but, because they do not have looms or money for yarn, the building sat idle until the male weavers moved in.

> *They built a small training centre for people from outside to watch women weave. Only Anglican women were allowed. I was the leader of this group. It was very promising at first; people came and watched but then there was not enough financial backing and people lost enthusiasm. Recently I and another girl were invited to the Culture Centre in Kumasi to demonstrate our skills. I was even on T.V.* (Adwoa, 18)

> *There was supposed to be money for looms when the weaving shed was built but the money they received in Bonwire was all used to build the shed. Because they did not have the looms they thought it wise to let the men use the shed. The pastor who was in charge of the project in Kumasi has travelled to America. The Anglican Bishop solicited the money for development projects and put the pastor in Kumasi in charge of dispensing. The idea came from the outside. some one wanted to do something about employment for women. It may have been a tourist or a visitor that got the idea, but it was the Anglican church that was putting it up for their women members. They thought that kente was famous and the women could get involved with it.* (Mr. Badu)

I attempted to investigate whether the money for looms was ever received, but the principals involved were on extended leave. The shed may have taken the larger portion of the funding and the project was then abandoned as so many projects in Ghana are. Since CEDEP was not involved in the initial stages, Mrs Prempeh had also tried to determine what had happened to the loom money, but questioning the priest is a delicate matter.

> *I remember the priest* [the Anglican priest in charge of the whole district] *who was in charge of the program. He said there was some money for looms, but I do not know if this was done. Women who were available should have been able to get looms, the looms in the shed. Dealing with church groups can be quite embarrassing. When you start to question the priest, they sometimes look at it as interference.* (Mrs Prempeh)

Another attempt was made to acquire looms for the women. An individual who knew some people in America, promised to help the women in Bonwire acquire some weaving tools. She came to Bonwire and interviewed them to see what they needed, then she was going to try to solicit help from NGO's, but she has not returned. Some young women learned to weave, and they went to Kumasi and Accra to demonstrate their weaving skills (see Figure 8.4). Without looms, however, the weaving project tapered off.

One day I asked Adwoa if she would demonstrate her weaving skills for video taping. She took me to the women's weaving shed, which was occupied by men, and after asking one young man if she could use a loom, she wove for a few minutes. However, there was much protest and argument from some of the weavers. Victor, my interpreter reported the following account of the event:

> *The fight was like this. This girl entered the place and greeted them .She said she wanted to come and do some demonstration for you to film her. This guy called me and said we don't do this, just let someone come and jump into our looms, - it was someone who was on break. He said we sought permission. The argument between the men is that if you allow women in they think they will own the place. They shouldn't sit amongst men weaving. They should weave on their own.*
> *SHE: Where were you when we were working on this building? When we carried water? We did all the work on this and we have given it to you to use. When we have our meeting, I'm going to mention this to the leaders and we'll make sure of what we are going to do.*
> *THEY: We pay cash and nobody owns any looms here, or yarns, why should you come here? etc.*
> *She said she should be allowed, but that really angered them because they have been paying for this place. They won't let a woman in. They know that the women can come at any time to take the building from them because they have not put any money into the place. These men will do everything to discourage women. The building is not being cared for because they are only renting it. The women are not weaving because they have no yarns - but where are the looms?* [Victor]

I asked Mr Owusui for his account of the protest against Adwoa.

> *People were upset because everything that is in this room belongs to the people in this shed. We rented the shed. She had no business touching any of this stuff. She didn't ask. But you have come here and I will give you a chance to weave. Everybody in here has their own loom. I would teach women how to weave.* (Mr. Owusui)

I think the real problem of why the young men and their leader protested so much is that Adwoa was not exhibiting the preferred female characteristics. She was defiant; she invaded male territory. In the traditional culture, female and male generally do not share work space when they are doing the same type of labour. The men were upset because she did not pay attention to the rules. In effect, it was my fault for having requested the demonstration, however she did enjoy the encounter. She was a woman behaving like a man. Some of the young men "bothered" her later, but she reported that it did not create too much difficulty for her.

I asked the Master Weaver if anyone had protested when the Anglican women's weaving shed was built.

> *The shed was not made for women - it was made for the church members who wanted to weave. This may include women but where is there a woman who knows how to weave who will sit in there and weave? It was made for the church members*

> *to display and sell cloths to tourists and the church would derive money from this. It was not meant for women. Who would teach the women? No woman could weave as well as I can.* (Master weaver)

The women's weaving project has now resumed. My research brought attention to the fact that the last project had failed. CEDEP targeted the Kente Weaving Project as one of three for special considerations in 1997 (the year following my fieldwork). They were working with the Anglican Mother's Union in Bonwire. CEDEP had approached a number of organizations, including the North American Women's Association for funding. They were looking for 7 million cedis[35], to purchase basic materials and looms for ten women.

Mrs. Prempeh, co-ordinator for CEDEP's Women's Forum, said that CEDEP was committed to encouraging women's weaving on several fronts. They were going to recommend that traditional kente weaving be taught to both boys and girls in schools. They would start by contacting the Ghana Education Service (GES) people who were on the CEDEP board. They would also "work on" or try to persuade the older women to approve of the projects "*to break the cycle of male domination. It is an ideology perpetuated by men*" [that women will be harmed if they take up weaving]. Younger women and girls look up to the older women as role models. They would also try to use the church if they could persuade the Anglican priest to talk against the taboo from the pulpit. They would be taking every opportunity to feature the young women who already know how to weave at fairs and other events. Women kente weavers were registered to demonstrate their craft at the next International Trade Fair (involving global participation) to be held in Ghana.

My investigation also came to the attention of the Queen Mother who was prepared to lend her support to help the young women who were interested to learn to weave.

> *At the next Akwasidae I will look into women weaving. We can organize them and encourage them. The taboo is no more. There wasn't any taboo; I think the men wanted the women to be in the kitchen cooking for them, so they just said a woman sitting in a loom would get swollen feet, edema or what ever.* (Queen Mother)

The Kentehene and the other chiefs were also in favour of women weaving. The need to find employment for young women is a serious one. At present, women have to leave the village to enter income-generating employment (and men do not), so that anything, even if it means going against traditional practice, which will allow the young women to stay in the village is preferable. The New Kentehene's concern was that women should plan to keep up the high standard of producing quality kente cloth.

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[35] This was less than $7,000.00 Canadian in 1996, but is now approximately $4,300.00.

> *Recently, though, things are changing because of development and schooling, we should do something about it. So, we have poured libations about it, and I recognize now it is okay. . . . About a year a go, we heard from the parliament that certain women want to weave, and what can we do about it. As far as our custom is, certain things are not allowed, but if we do something about it to inform our ancestors, because of this thing, "we are giving you this drink for you to help us that anything can't happen after". So we have poured libation to cover everything. It is safe now for women to weave. My biggest concern is that the weaving that is produced in Bonwire is quality.* (New Kentehene 39)

Subsequent to my last visit to Ghana in the beginning of 1997, CEDEP has organized another educational venture to help women become weavers. Mrs. Prempeh sent me an article printed in the Daily Graphic (1998, January 15) which featured the CEDEP Women's Weaving Project on the front page. The Trinity Church and the Anglican Diocesan Mother's Union are collaborating with CEDEP in this renewed venture. They held a week long kente festival at Bonwire to promote women's weaving. Twenty young women were taught to weave and eight of them were featured in a weaving contest (see Figure 8.5). The success of the project depends partially on women acquiring their own looms[36]. I do not know if the looms that the women were using were borrowed from men, or if they actually belonged to the project. Now that the project has support from the chiefs and the Queen Mother of Bonwire, as well as from CEDEP, and has interested a large number of local girls and young women, it does to some extent fulfill the requirements of a "grass roots" development project.

The definition of development as defined by Akande (1992:61) "as the process whereby the economy undergoes social and economic transformations geared towards improving the quality of life of its citizens" requires an input of information at all levels. Too much of development, particularly in Ghana, has been top down, where the supplier of the "development" is also the supplier of the information on the perceived need and the manner of solutions. This can create projects which cannot do else than fail at several levels. For example, the first Anglican Women's Weaving Project was begun because a white woman came to Bonwire and said that women should be able to weave. Furthermore, she felt that they should be visible to tourists. With her connections back in the United States, she set up a fundraiser to supply the money needed to build a weaving shed and to get the program started. Some of the women in the village were very enthusiastic about the project and several learned how to weave. Some of them were already older girls and when they got married, their weaving days were over; they either moved elsewhere with their husbands or moved on to other work. There was no continuing funding for teaching younger girls how to weave and the project had not yet progressed to a profitable enterprise, therefore the whole project collapsed. Then, so as not to waste valuable space, the shed was used by men and their looms.

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[36] The Department of Human Ecology at the University of Alberta has become involved in a small way as well. Funding has been provided from the Clothing and Textiles Collection Donors' Matching Fund for one loom and money to begin one kente cloth for Adwoa, the young woman who was so interested in weaving. The finished cloth will be purchased for the University of Alberta Clothing and Textiles Collection.

Should women weave? Why? Why not?

When I asked the people of Bonwire if women should be allowed to weave, I received such a range of answers that it was necessary to divide the responses into thematic groups. No individual holds only a single view to the exclusion of other views, therefore, the groupings are arbitrary and somewhat imprecise. I will briefly describe the themes and then illustrate them with quotes from the interviewees. Here is a statement which covers most of the themes.

> *Women should not weave at all because it is forbidden. Who would cook for the husband if he has been working at weaving all day and the wife has some work she wants to finish; then the man would go hungry. There would be no respect for the man if the wife would earn as much money as him. There would be tension in the house. Women are not strong enough to endure weaving. It is too hard on a woman. I believed women would be barren* [if they weave] *but I know one woman who wove and had two children. I believe more in the tradition than in the taboo. Weaving was given to men.* (Mr. Marfoh, 37)

If we examine this statement, we can see that there are a number of concerns Mr. Marfoh has about allowing women to weave. *Women should not weave because it is forbidden*. This is the old defence men have been using to keep women from trying to weave. A number of older men admitted that men originally made the rules (taboos) against women to exclude them. However, these men who made the rules are now ancestors. The ancestors also evoked the spirits and created the gods which could protect the loom, the weaver, and the cloth. Some of the spirits[37] reside in the loom and could punish the women if they touched the loom. Because the ancestors imbued weaving with sacredness, up until recently, men believed that harm would come to the village if they disobeyed the ancestors.

> *Everything about the loom is sacred. They used to be made, the looms, on the farms in the forest. Women were not allowed to see the making of the loom. The loom is like the arm and the hand is the functioning part.* (Master Weaver)

Christianity has had an enormous impact on the traditional belief system. The majority of people in Bonwire no longer practice traditional religion. The church has been telling them that the old gods are gone and the old taboos need not be observed anymore.

> *When the taboos were strong, no woman ever tried to weave or had the courage to weave. After some time, the old men nullified what they said; oh, we just said that to keep women from weaving. Maybe it was that some women overheard men talking, maybe it was said in men's circles, drinking bars or whatever. Later on it became a secret from women. In the early days child-bearing was very, very important to the women, their system depended on it. That is why they used this particular thing, that if you weave, you will not give birth. The women got to know this, and were scared. When they prohibited women from weaving, they backed it with the idea that it was something divine from one of these gods. That it was an instruction from one of these gods that under no circumstances should a woman ever weave.*
>
> *Weaving is a gift that has been given to men of Bonwire to do. If there is a big Durbar, and the Chief says this through the linguist, with all the fetish priests and priestesses supporting this idea believing that this is really coming from above, you have no right to challenge it. ... They were always trying to attribute everything to the gods; like the gods commanded this, the gods commanded that. But Christianity has wiped away the taboos and traditions, everything. I go to the Anglican church and they say I have the right to be a weaver. God gives the power to give birth and not the old gods. When the first woman tried to weave, she found out that there was no truth to the taboo.* (Adwoa, 18)

None of the unmarried young women whom I interviewed believed that they would be harmed if they touched the loom. In fact, no women now believed that weaving could harm women. That is not to say that all women believed that women should be allowed to weave; they did not. Rather, they did not believe that it could harm them. Salomey, before she started weaving, did believe that women could be harmed, however, she never believed that she would be harmed. Now that she has given birth to two children, she no longer believes the taboo. Prior to Christianity, women did not even try to weave.

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[37] Wild spirits are said to reside in certain trees in the forest. Loom parts in the past were secretly carved in the forest, presumably to "capture the spirit" within the wood. The loom was then both a protective force for the weaver, and a punishing force for those not acquainted with the spirit, namely women.

Men are less certain of the continuing validity of the taboo; a minority of men from all age groups believed the taboos to some degree. However, Christianity is no more a protection against the belief in the taboo, then traditional religion is a predictor of such belief.

> *There are spirits all around. Women nowadays are so interested in weaving and sitting in the loom they don't pay any attention to the signs that the spirits are displeased. Even if people no longer believe in the spirits, they are still there. There are some young girls who like to sit in the loom but they don't even know the dangers. If the breast beam of the loom touches a woman's belly, she will be Barren. If you tell them that, they say you are a 'Colonial' person and belong to the Gold Coast era.* (Master Weaver)

> *I've heard many people say women could get barren from this, and even if it isn't true, what if you are not lucky enough to get babies when you get married? I am a Christian. I have never seen it in the bible that if a woman weaves she will still bring forth. I can't distinguish.* (Peter, 18)

> *What is so important about kente? If a woman sits inside a loom she will be barren. The old men [ancestors] have poured libation on it and therefore it has become taboo.* (Yaw A, 22)

> *As a Christian I don't have to believe these things but others recognize these things. I still respect these things. . . . They still uphold some of those things, those beliefs. Women have been stopped from doing weaving.* (Isaac, 18)

People who believe the taboos against women weaving are very concerned with harm to women and future progeny. The harm is thought to come from physical contact from the loom as well as from disobeying the ancestors and disregarding the spirits. The harm is physical but the agent is supernatural. To those who believe in the taboo, it is not necessary for others to believe, to be harmed when transgressing. The largest concern is a two-fold risk, that women will be struck infertile and that if she does conceive, the baby will be damaged in the womb.

Although many Christians still profess belief in the taboos, evidence shows that women have not been harmed.

> *I am not a medical man so I cannot tell if the woman would come to harm in the loom. There are several jobs where women are doing a man's job and they have not come to harm. Women, traditionally were not allowed to barber, but now women are doing it and no harm.* (Kentehene Nana Gyamfi)

Some educated people, who do not believe the taboos, are also concerned with harm to women and future progeny. Again, the fears are that women will have difficulty to conceive, or may risk miscarriage if she spends long hours at the loom. These people, however, blame the technology. They believe that every practice has a practical, physical reason for its origins, therefore, women were no doubt banned from weaving for a reason. The only real counterclaim to this argument is the limited experience of women who have learned to weave and are still healthy.

> *They are still saying that women sitting for a long time, it is not healthy for them, but the men are also saying they can't sit for long. It is thought that the long periods of sitting in the loom may affect fertility for both men and women. Need to get an industrial doctor to research this. Both genders need to take precautions to stay healthy. I first was interested in the topic of harm to women when CEDEP launched the forum. We started to interview outsiders from Bonwire. I was told, because of the cloth take-up bar, the body would be stifled. They developed a loom* [the Bette *loom] which gives more room to pregnant women. As far as fertility, if you are not that healthy when you have a normal period, you may affect the uterine pelvic area.* (Mrs Prempeh)

Now to examine Mr. Marfoh's second statement: *Who would cook for the husband if he has been working at weaving all day and the wife has some work she wants to finish; then the man would go hungry.* Almost all the young men and boys, and a few older men, made a similar statement. They were concerned that a wife who weaves would either not cook because she wanted to finish her own weaving, or that she would not cook because she made enough money so that she no longer needed to respect him. This concern is attached to one of the fundamental basics of gender relations in Akan society, the need for men to know that the relationship and thus, the marriage is thriving. When a man expresses the fear that his wife might not cook for him, he is expressing a fear that his wife no longer needs him. In other words, if she earns an amount adequate to meet her needs and her children's needs, she will become too independent. She will have no need for a husband. There is support for the hypothesis that certain women do not need men in the evidence that widows tend not to remarry. Unmarried men are even more concerned than are married men, therefore they do not speak from experience but from lack of experience.

> *Women should not weave. For instance, if I am just married and my wife is also weaving, who will cook for me?* (Peter, 18)

> *I do not think that by the time I am ready to get married that I will find a woman that is fully involved in weaving. I will not marry a woman who wants to weave. I am not worried if the woman has more money than the man; I am thinking of the family and who will take care of them and what they will eat. Who will take care of the children. I can cook for myself. The woman will not have the time to weave.*
> (Isaak, 18)

Isaac and a number of other young men admit that they can cook for themselves if they have to. They would not starve if their wives could not cook because of illness or other work. However, they would not cook if their wives were weaving.

> *I could support a family on weaving, but I would expect my wife to have a job, but not kente. It is a very difficult job the weaving. If the woman would be involved in a full-time job, I would be obliged to do the cooking and help when she is not around. But if the woman was weaving kente and it was taking up most of her time, I would not do it for her, because it is not a woman's job.* (John, 23)

Women have managed their time in other areas of their lives without making a husband suffer. Women realize this, as do older men.

> *But people have believed these traditions for a long time, and even though they know different now, it is hard for them to accept it. We accept it that women can do anything a man can do, but it is difficult to really accept it inside. The people who are afraid are the young ones. Strangely, because they think they are going to be robbed of what is rightfully theirs. Their inheritance being given to the women.*
> (Kentehene Nana Akwasi Gyamfi)

Mr. Marfoh's next statement, "*There would be no respect for the man if the wife would earn as much money as him. There would be tension in the house",* is concerned with two related concepts: The use of the word "respect" here is in the sense that a woman must "obey" and "defer" to a man. Men receive respect from their wives if the wife is dependent on him. A woman who earns as much money as her husband will not be as dependent as a woman who earns much less. Furthermore, money commands respect among the Asante regardless of whose hands it is in. Both men and women gain the respect (used in the western sense) of the community if they are financially secure.

> *Whenever the woman earns more money than the man, she has a tendency to be stubborn and not heed his advice. Fortunately that isn't often the case in this village. When you go to the big cities, it is there.* (Afia, 30+)

> *Women getting money as much as, or more than, men always creates problems. Respect to husband means being submissive and a woman would not respect a husband if she doesn't depend on him. Young men want what their fathers and grandfathers had but they are seeing changes and are afraid of them. It is easy for old people to say it is okay for changes because they won't have to deal with the consequences.* (Madam Yaa, 58)

The other concept is that of competition between spouses. This was expressed mainly by young men, however, most men avoid any competition with women. This is due to the fear of being deemed inadequate, of not being smart enough or quick enough. Tradition holds that men are superior, therefore, there is danger in competition with women. This concern is often hidden under the guise of women should not "behave like a man". In a culture where men gain respect and position through personal achievement, when they are young, they can ill afford to risk being bested by a woman. Kente weaving is the traditional forum in Bonwire for men to gain position. They are judged on their speed, the quality of their weaving, and their creativity in creating new designs. If women are allowed to weave, then they too could gain a similar prestige through personal achievement, and therefore would be in direct competition with men.

> *If the woman earns as much money as a man she will have no respect for her husband. That is a typical statement from this area; not only for weavers.*
> (Mrs Prempeh)

> *In kente weaving you have to set yourself targets and then finish on time. You cannot leave at any time. Women, when they devote time to something they become powerful. Women are known for their accomplishments. If women gain power and still respect the husband, it would be good. But, most people when they gain power start to order others about.* (Madam Yaa, 58)

> *This taboo was instituted because they wanted to command some kind of respect from the women. They didn't like the idea of doing the same job as a woman. They had to bring in this taboo to scare women away from doing this weaving. I am sure that a woman who goes into the loom will be able to bring forth. There is nothing hazardous that will happen to her when she goes into the loom . . .women should still not be encouraged to weave because it is a hard job for them. Even though we are in the scientific age, and women are doing all that a man can do, it is still a hard job for them. The taboos are man-made.* (John, 23)

> *Women should not be allowed to weave, especially if they are my age, they would really mock her and scorn her, and laugh at her at school. They would associate her with the things that men do and would think she is a woman*

> *trying to be a man. She would not find it easy to go back in the school. It has happened that I have seen it. Especially when she is really young. You need to challenge the community when you are old.* (Boy, 14)

Mr. Marfoh's next statement that *"Women are not strong enough to endure weaving. It is too hard on a woman."* Was voiced by a number of men, but no women. The concern was not that women lacked the strength to try weaving but that women were not strong enough to weave on a regular basis. This sentiment was expressed both by men who approved of women weaving and those who did not. Asante village women work long, hard hours at very physically demanding labour. Agricultural work, using the most primitive of tools, is not easier than weaving. Furthermore, women's other labour, such as laundry and pounding fufu is accomplished without any technological aids, and is therefore also hard, physical work.

The underlying assumption is that women are more frail because of their reproductive physiology. Where women do not always receive adequate nutrition, not because females are weaker but because females have economic disadvantages, there may be some self-fulfilling basis for this paradigm. When food is inadequate, women will short themselves on nutrition so that they can feed their children. Further, since female children after infancy, cannot share a bowl with men, while male children can, the marginalized girl child may have less nutrition than her brother. Nonetheless, any strong, healthy woman should have no difficulty weaving; where the difficulty lies is with finding the time to weave.

> *No, I think that women should be out of it. In my opinion it is not good for women to weave because of their domestic responsibilities. The church doesn't go against this (women weaving). Christian belief doesn't go against women weaving. I don't believe women will be barren if they weave. Besides she not working in the house cooking for me and everything, I think that it really "sucks", it really needs a lot of strength. If a woman does it, she wears out early, very early.* (Kwaku, 23)

> *Most women are not strong enough to weave all the time. It is too hard on pregnant women. They must also invest* [their time] *in other things. I used to stay at my workshop sometimes 24 hours to build up my business. I hardly came home. I work at the Centre now for 9 hours and then go to my shop. Sometimes I only sleep for one hour if I have a pressing job.* (Mr. Dapaah)

> *I devote the whole day to it if I want to weave, because I am not as accomplished as other weavers. Sometimes my thighs get really tired from sitting in the loom. I think that the reason they didn't allow women to weave was that they thought*

> *women were not strong enough, but they are. Men also get tired from weaving and have to rest. No man has stopped me from weaving, some even marvel that I can weave. I am a novelty when I weave, and the men love it when they watch me weave. Most of the elders don't know that I am a weaver or think that I am just playing at it. I can only weave for others because I don't have my own loom. So I weave when my friend is finished for the day.* (Adwoa)

Asante women have a lot of responsibilities and therefore must work very hard. Women recognize the amount of time they must devote to weaving to be come proficient at it and they are well aware of the other duties they are expected to perform. Older, and elderly, men generally acknowledged that women have too much work. This is a very real concern and is attached not only to the amount of time a woman must spend in her other duties but also to how much support she can count on, for child care, from other female members of her matrilineage.

> *I have not seen women weaving but today women who are allowed can do anything. However, it is difficult for women because of other commitments, to farming, to cooking, to child care. I approve of women weaving but I think women have too much to do. But if a woman is not dependent on a man then she could weave. It would fit into the life of a single woman. I never thought of weaving. Women did not rebel; they were tired after their own work. Women work more and harder than men.* (Madam Akosua, 53)

> *Since most of the work is ordered, and we have to weave it quickly, my daughter is not often involved in it. She has too many distractions with the children. The cloths have to be done quickly. Before she had children she was given a chance to weave only when we did not have pressing deadlines because she is slower at weaving. She cannot weave as fast as the men. She would weave only 12 strips when they produce 24 strips.* (Mr. Badu)

> *What takes a fast weaver 3 to 4 days to weave will take me 7 to 8 days and a male peer about 5 to 6 days since I have more interruptions with child care and other duties. If my husband lived in my village I would have less time for weaving.* (Salomey, 27)

> *When women have small children, it is difficult for them to weave. They can do it before they have children, and when the children are growing older.* (Mr. Owusui, 56)

> *Weaving is a tedious job. Their laps are very important for women. They need them to put the babies on for breast feeding, and other things. Time is another problem.* (Man, 45+)

> *We live in a modern age so it is okay for women to weave now. If a woman is*

> *farming, it may be too much for a woman to also weave. It is okay for women to weave now as long as it doesn't add to the burden of women's work. Through education we know so much more than we did before.* (Nana Kofi, 87)

It is not only that weaving takes a huge time commitment, but that learning to weave takes time. Boys start to learn while they are still in school. They can devote the after school hours and weekends to learning to weave. Girls in Bonwire have other chores they must help with.

> *Children will help during school vacation. Boys have no other chores after school but girls must help with the farming and housework so they don't have as much time to learn to weave.* (Madam Akosua, 53)

People, who can find no other viable reason for their stand against women weaving, will stress the **traditional** nature of the practice. Mr. Marfoh's last statement illustrates this idea. *I believed women would be barren* [if they weave] *but I know one woman who wove and had two children. I believe more in the tradition than in the taboo. Weaving was given to men.* Those who professed a belief in the tradition were elderly women, some women with young children, some young boys, and a few older adult males. The adult males who cited tradition tended to practice traditional religion as well.

It is difficult to win an argument against tradition without arguing about the reasons of how and why the practice first began. Tradition was not generally the first choice people gave of why women should not weave. It was the last choice, and therefore where they took a stand when all other arguments were indefensible. Women with small children, on the other hand, chose tradition first. These women were quite dependent (with the exception of Akosua who had no husband) on their husbands for financial help with the children, and could no longer depend on their matrilineage.

> *Now the problem is support of families. Before you had the support of your lineage, but now you may have to rely more on the husband. If he dies, he will leave you something. So if you can support him when he needs it, it is fine. From time immemorial weaving of kente has never been women's business. I have never desired to weave. If there is a girl in this village who wants to weave I have no objection to it but I would advise her not to do it. But because of the modern age, women's independence, I would not stop her.* (Afia, 30+)

> *I cannot envision women weaving. It will not happen here. Women will never be allowed to weave. I have never wanted to weave and do not want to talk about women weaving. I never desired to weave because it is forbidden.* (Akosua, 36)

> *It is now being allowed but I don't think women should be allowed to weave. If someone really, really wants to weave who would stop her? I am not afraid of any sickness associated with it.* (Maame Yaa, 60)

> *I feel I will be killed if I would allow women to weave because the ancestors are not going to allow it. I am very much afraid of it for my uncle* [the Kentehene] *as well. I think he will be killed by the ancestors who designed this tradition. If you turn back the rituals and taboos involved with the ancestors and stools they will turn back at you and you will get sick and die an untimely death.* (Yaw A., 22)

We have examined the statements against women weaving. Now we will look at some of the reasons in favour of women weaving. The people who approved of women weaving countered many objections with the **modern scientific age** argument. The idea is that women have shown that they are capable of accomplishing on par with men, therefore they should be allowed to do so. This is the argument given most often by older men. They have seen such huge changes in their lifetime that it makes sense to them that young people (including females) have far more options than they themselves had.

> *I believe that this is the modern scientific era and women can do any kind of work and should be allowed to. I would teach a woman but have not done so.*
> (Mr. Cophie)

> *We live in a modern age so it is okay for women to weave now. If a woman is farming, it may be too much for a woman to also weave. It is okay for women to weave now as long as it doesn't add to the burden of women's work. What happened to the taboos? Through education we know so much more than we did before.*
> (Nana Kofi)

> *I teach my girls the farming but if they wanted to learn to weave I would teach them. We are now in the modern age and women can do now what men can do. They can weave, but if they are married they can't. The old taboo, they were afraid of that but we have seen that it is not true.* (Mr. Owusui)

> *In this modern technological age, why shouldn't women weave? I support women weaving.* (Madam Yaa)

Another argument for women being allowed to weave is that it would be economically beneficial for them. Women are not supported as much financially by their matrilineage as they were in the past. Nor can they necessarily depend on the husband to give this support. Therefore women and children often suffer.

> *No woman gets as much* [money] *as a man. Women invest all in the children and cannot therefore save money. A wife cannot shirk feeding the family while a*

> *husband can say he has no money and no court in the world can get money out of him; and still the children need to eat.* (Madam Akosua, 53)

> *You can earn much more money from kente than from plaiting hair. If I had a loom and the support, I would weave. But there is only support for men's weaving here. They are supposed to earn the money and bring it into the house.* (Ama, 20)

> *In the olden times, they wouldn't allow women to weave because a weaver was the 'breadwinner' and they wanted to limit it only to the men. ... If they had shown women to weave, then women could also be breadwinners and they would not be limited to the kitchen. They would go out and weave and get the same amount of money and there would be a sort of a challenge in the house if she is married. If she is not married, she will decide for herself, and her choice will be in her own power. That is why they prevented women from weaving.* (Adwoa, 18)

Men also cited economic considerations as a reason for allowing women to weave. In fact one young man thought allowing women to weave might be a way of preventing precocious pregnancies in the village.

> *Women should be involved. Our forefathers sat down and decided that women weaving creates a problem. So if she has an assignment she may not be able to cook. For example, if she has a deadline to meet, it creates a problem between husband and wife. Also, pregnant women weaving can affect the child. Farming is harder and pregnant women still farm. Men didn't allow women to weave from the beginning. It is good for women to weave because there is no work here for the young girls. If the girls don't have work it causes teenage pregnancy because women need money so they sleep with men.* (Frank, 24)

Although most young males are against allowing women to weave, there is a measure of support for women weaving; a few would be willing to marry a weaver. Most of the latter are related to women who know how to weave, therefore, it may be that they are more aware of the benefits of having a wife who is more self-sufficient. They also agree that if the husband objects to his wife weaving, then she has "no chance".

> *Men can talk about women's stuff but women don't dare talk about men's stuff. That women's opinions are not considered is endemic in Asante.* (Madam Yaa)

It appears to be in the hands of individual husbands whether a wife is allowed to weave. Men would not order other men to let their wives weave. Women, at least once they are married, have no say in the matter. More men would allow their sisters to weave than would marry a weaver. Sisters will be other men's wives and therefore, another man will decide if she should be allowed to continue weaving after marriage.

> *It is the individual woman's business if she thinks she has the strength and the intelligence to weave, then she can do it. Each male weaver is an independent entrepreneur, weaving is not really organized. I might marry a woman who weaves, but it would be good if she puts me ahead of her weaving. Then it would be good.* (Yaw, 20)

> *Ah, yes, I am a Christian, so I don't believe these restrictions. Because what our parents taught there is nothing that can be "strange" to us. The only thing we prefer is the word of God. So I follow what the word tells me. One of my mothers weaves. If they have any work to do is no problem, they can do. If the husband agrees, they can do it. The man has to agree before because not all men are Christians. So they do as the forefathers and so they wouldn't agree to women to weave. But some of them are agreed to women weaving. They are agreed for their wives to weave.* (Jacob, 21)

The women who have learned to weave see themselves as role models for other girls. For whatever reason, they have not noticed much opposition to their learning how to weave. This is likely due to the fact that one of the women did not own a loom, and the other woman did not commonly weave in public. Although the majority of young men were against marrying a weaver, the young women were not at all concerned that they might not find a husband.

> *No one has ever tried to prevent me from weaving. I consider myself a pioneer and will teach my daughters if they want to learn to weave. I hope they want to be weavers. The ability to weave and my skill at the loom brings me a lot of attention. People marvel at a woman knowing how to weave kente.* (Salomey, 27)

Women under the age of 30 are overwhelmingly supportive of women who want to weave. Women in their 30's and women over 60 are just as strongly against it. Margaret, a mother of young children, was perhaps the most vocal (and sarcastic) of the these women. She is married to a weaver and likely does not have a supportive matrilineage.

> *Women don't weave; it is not true that women weave. Have you seen that project? Did you see a woman weave there? You see, it is not true that women weave. I would not be happy to see women weave, but some women think that they can be men. It should not be encouraged at all. The taboos are man-made, but they need to be respected because the Gods are also man-made. Some women have tried to weave and they were not barren. I know several. It was still not accepted in the village for women to weave and won't be. The menstrual taboos are now only observed by women whose husbands weave for the Asantehene. My husband does not weave for the Asantehene. I will not allow my daughters to weave.*
> (Margaret, 30)

One of the many reasons the kente weaving industry has persisted is that it is possible to make a living at it. I was told that a good weaver can make more money than either a policeman or a taxi driver. Many of the young weavers are not at a skill level where they can command good prices. The double weave and the more intricate patterns are time consuming; boys who do not expect to stay in weaving, often don't bother to learn them. To make a good living at weaving, the weaver must make a solid committment to thoroughly learn the craft. Few of the young weavers whom I interviewed were prepared to do so. Because women have fewer options, and because Asante women do tend to work hard at whatever job they do, chiefs are prepared to support women's efforts.

> *Those men who say they can support their families with weaving are right, it is becoming economically viable but it is still not sufficient, the woman also has to work. There should be no restrictions, women should be given the chance to do whatever they want. Even if they want to weave kente in this village. It is still hard for young men to accept this, because they will be living with their parents and they have seen the respect their mothers have given their fathers because the women are low income earners. But what if they are given the chance to stand shoulder to shoulder with men, money wise and everything. So they are scared of this whole idea.* (Kentehene Nana Akwasi Gyamfi)

The problem, however, is not about whether women can do the weaving or whether women can commit the time but about whether a married woman will be allowed to do so.

> *The Anglican project started in 1991, but it didn't last long. The women who came to the centre were mothers and they didn't have time to spend as much time as they needed to learn. There was no motivation at all. In the end these people had to leave the centre earlier because they had to see to their children's needs and their husbands, so they didn't give it the time. Everything was organized around the women but they couldn't give it the time to learn the skills. They lost interest in it.*
> [Adwoa, 18]

The last word in this chapter is from a wise man, former Kentehene, Nana Gyamfi.

> *During my days, the taboos went with the relatives. There was this belief that the woman has the responsibilities of the house, the children, and the cooking. If she is a weaver she has the added pressures of weaving. The young men think the old men are dying. If they brought this in (women weaving) then they will have to cope with that and that is why they don't want it to happen. It is a very thorny problem. The young men don't want to accept it and the old ones are going to be dying so it isn't their problem. If you are married and you allow your wife to have another job, if the job is time consuming, women have been known to be able to schedule it so they can still cook for their husbands. But with kente, it is going to be a novelty so they don't know how they will be able to adjust to it.*

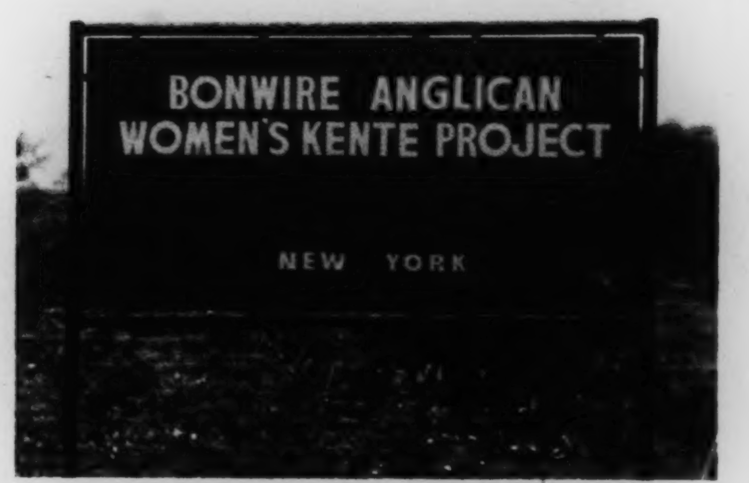

BONWIRE ANGLICAN
WOMEN'S KENTE PROJECT
NEW YORK

Figure 8.1. Sign outside women's weaving shed. Photograph by M. Bergen.

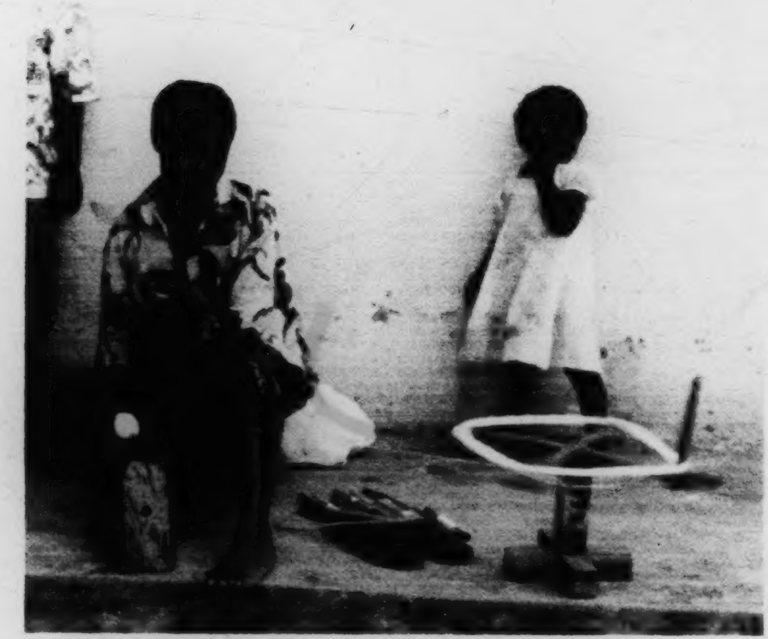


Figure 8.2. Both girls and boys earn small amounts of money winding yarn onto bobbins for weavers. Photograph by M. Bergen.

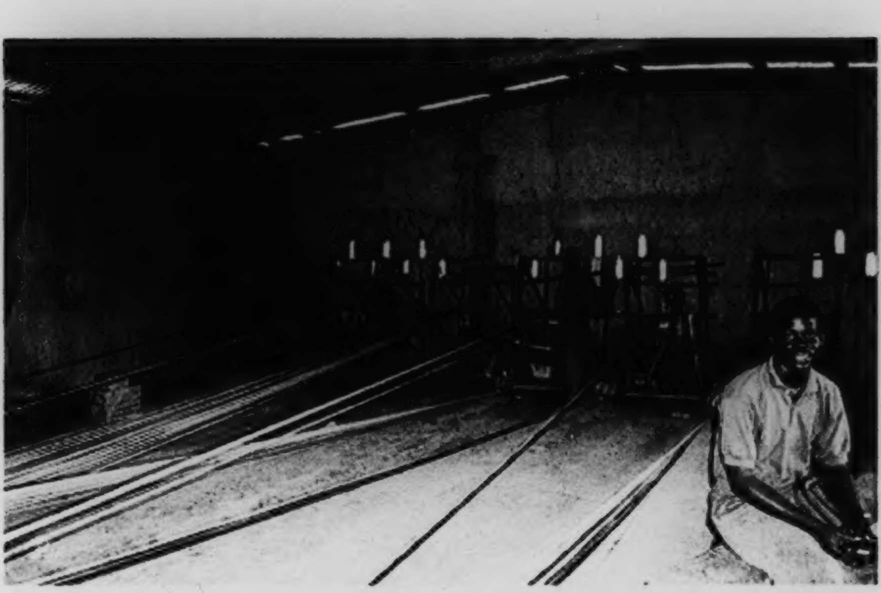


Figure 8.4. The interior of the Bonwire Anglican Women's Weaving Shed. All the weavers in this shed were male. My interpreter, Victor, is on the right. Photograph by M. Bergen.

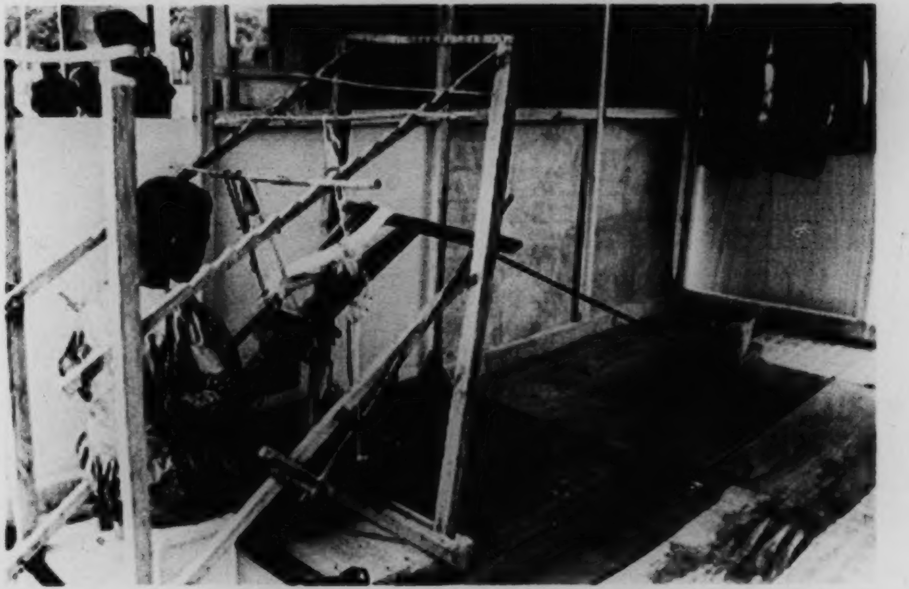


Figure 8.3. A girl named Gifty demonstrating weaving at a trade fair in Accra. This girl was quite an accomplished weaver and had appeared on national television. Photograph by M. Bergen.

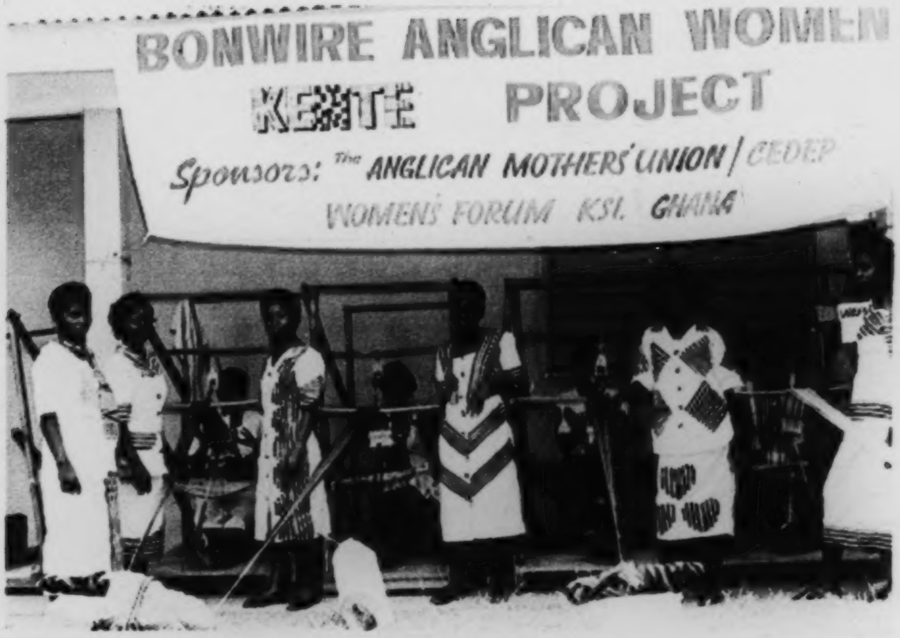

BONWIRE ANGLICAN WOMEN
KENTE PROJECT
Sponsors: The ANGLICAN MOTHERS' UNION / CEDEP
WOMEN'S FORUM KSI. GHANA

Figure 8.5. Ten weavers competing at the Kente Festival in Bonwire January 5 – 11, 1998. These are some of the young women who are being taught to weave through the Bonwire Anglican Women's Kente Project. Photograph by Mrs. Prempeh.

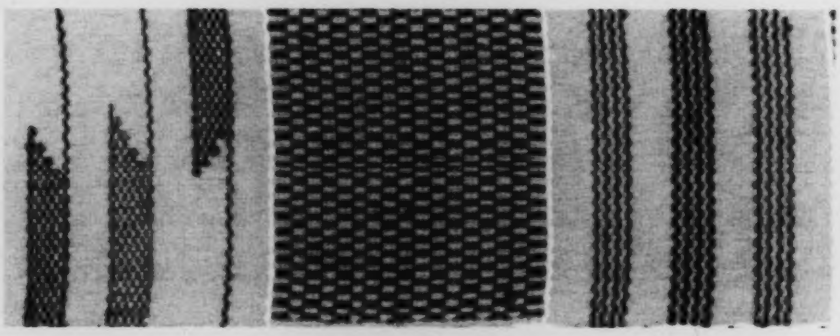


Figure 8.6. "Sika Futura" (Gold Dust) kente pattern. Photograph by M. Bergen.

CHAPTER NINE

REFLECTIONS

> "Structure" and "description" will never cover actuality. The Ding an sich, the very thing itself, will always comprise an infinitude of details. There are gaps of detail between details. However fine the mesh of our net of description, smaller details will always escape description. (Bateson, 1987:164)

In the beginning of this research, I wanted to investigate what it meant for women to take up the traditional men's role of weaving. I became more interested in why women were not weaving and what the resistance was to women weaving. The direction my research took was the direct result of my encounters with the people of Bonwire. In the beginning, not always understanding which questions to ask nor where the answers would lead me, I left myself open to learn what was important to the people of Bonwire. While I did focus on women and weaving, the answers to my ever broadening questions solicited an abundance of information which on the surface was not directly related to weaving. Through further questioning, I began to understand how it was related; how all that I was being told, affected the outcome of whether women would become weavers.

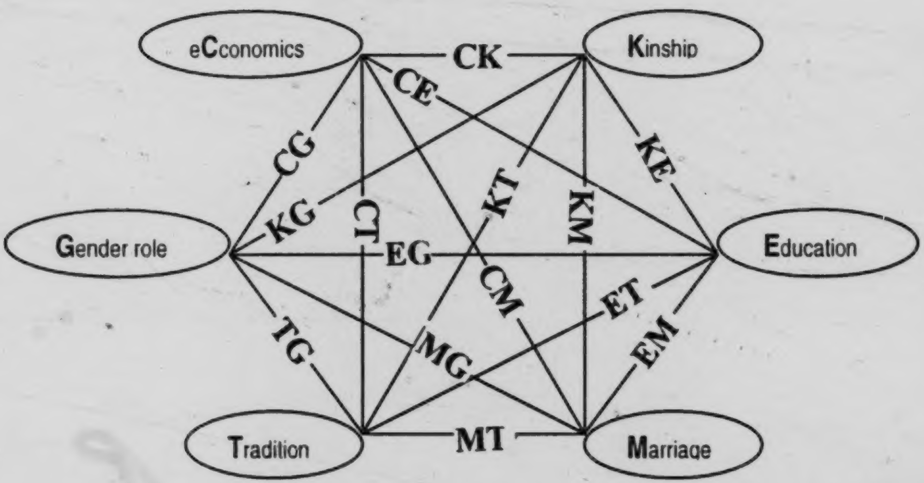
With such a volume of information, it was difficult to select what is included here and what is not. However, decisions must be made, and therefore, I used the information which best explains what the resistance is to women's weaving, and why women don't weave. The answers to these questions are more complicated than I expected, and involve a rather holistic view of the changes to Asante culture. It involved examining a number of seemingly conflicting systems of behavior within the context of changing circumstances and conditions. Such a complicated answer needs perforce, a simple qualifier. It must be understood, because of the dynamic nature of Ghanaian society and the Akan culture responding to change, that what is a valid answer today could not necessarily be claimed as truth tomorrow. The modernizing political and economic ideologies of Ghana are on a collision course with the Akan matrilineal kinship and traditional belief system. Thus, both gender role and the future of kente weaving is in flux; therefore neither the direction nor the extent of change can be accurately predicted. Because of the number of factors interacting together, not all are dealt with to the same depth of analysis.

My engagement with the subject of Asante women weaving has given me a wonderful opportunity to learn about gender relations within a matrilineal culture and how outside forces such as the Ghanaian economic conditions and the political activism of women's groups impact on those relations. In sharing my thoughts and insights, my hope is that I can increase the readers' understanding of how gender relations, the matrilineal system and the economic constraints impact on the access women have to a traditional men's craft like weaving. Further, I hope to convey the dynamism of Akan culture and the strength of the Asante people. They have, collectively and individually, faced tremendous changes to their lives, to the "way of being" Asante, and are actively seeking solutions to the problems this has precipitated.

My research clearly showed that it is impossible to understand one component of a person's life without looking at that person's life as operating within a complexity of systems. If I had learned only about weaving in Bonwire, I would not have understood the place gender relations, the economy, etc. have in weaving. Research within the Human Ecology discipline encourages a broader, inter-related view of humans, their actions and reactions within multiple environments. Therefore, to help me to understand the connectedness between the environments (as concepts) and how they related to the possibility of change in weaving practice, I used a network model proposed by Gerhart and Russell (1990). This cognitive model sees a field of meanings as a network of nodes (the concepts) and branches that connect the nodes (the relations). This model incorporates change as there are no fixed concepts, nor fixed relations between the concepts. Theory is then found in the structure of this field of meanings.

> To change a relation-the logical distance between two concepts-is to shift the locations of many related concepts and relations. Such changes of locations correspond to conceptual changes of meaning. Meaning then arises out of the interaction of concepts and relations, and is expressed in the topography of the field. Necessary concept changes, such as those that might arise from a new experience, alter relations: and changes in relations, such as occur when one attempts to understand an experience in a new way, relocate old concepts. (Gerhart & Russell, 1990:119)

Perhaps the best way to explain how I use the model is to imagine two hands with an enclosed piece of string making the figures of the cat's cradle (a popular children's game). When the fingers are moved, the strings are lengthened or shortened according to the distance between the fingers. Moving one finger, or changes in one concept, affect the relationships between all the others. The analogy works well both for how my research and understanding evolved in the field, and for how the Asante people interact with their environments. The changes which are occurring in kente weaving and the changes which are happening in Asante gender relations can only be explained by talking about the other changes which are happening in Ghana and even in other parts of the world.



1. Line CK - The capitalist economic system which is based on individual financial responsibility towards oneself and the nuclear family appears to be incompatible with the traditional, Akan extended lineage system which is based on diffused financial responsibility over the extended lineage. The increasingly difficult economic conditions are changing how much financial support an individual can or will give to his matrilineage. Traditionally, brothers are expected to help support a sister and her children. Some individuals are no longer fulfilling all their economic obligations. The lineage can also keep down the member who tries to get ahead by unduly burdening him with familial obligations.

2. Line CE - Village children may be kept out of school because the parents cannot afford to pay the textbook and uniform fees. If parents cannot afford to send all their children for a higher education, they will give preference to boys over girls. Girls are more likely to be kept at home to help with child care and other chores. Girls will therefore be less educated than their brothers and may be unable to support themselves or their children.

3. Line CM - In the past, all men and women desired large families. Men may have more than one wife, however, if men cannot afford more than one wife, they may desire their wives to have more children. At the same time, they cannot support the children they do have. Women then have the added burden of large families to support.

4. Line CT - Economic hardship impacts on tradition; when tradition becomes a stumbling block to economic well-being, it can be discarded and may lead to new traditions. However, as we see with women involved in weaving, tradition is easier to overcome for the one suffering the economic deprivation, than it is for the one favoured by tradition.

5. Line CG - Financial constraints force women to look for new ways to interpret their roles, they may have to "act like a man" to fulfil their obligations to their children.

6. Line KE - Traditionally, the father is responsible for the training (schooling) of the children, many young people felt that they had been abandoned in this area. Some fathers can't or won't pay school fees, nor do they provide them with training in crafts or trades. Women are responsible for training their daughters, however, when the father neglects his son, the mother will often pay for the son to the detriment of the daughter.

7. Line KM - A woman's matrilineage may put pressure on her to have more children than she desires to have. This was fine in the past when the matrilineage took more responsibility for its members. Now the woman may be left to shoulder the major portion of the rearing of her children.

8. Line KT - Tradition went "hand in glove" with the matrilineage system. The break down of the matrilineage system means that the matrilineage no longer can enforce adherence to tradition. If the lineage system were still as strong as it was in the past, women would not even have asked to weave. They began to question the veracity of the taboos, not because of Christianity (it is evident that Christians can believe the taboos) but because the country's economic problems had a detrimental effect on the matrilineage support system.

9. Line KG - Women are not always able to count on the support of their kin as they did in the past. While fostering is the traditional way of spreading out the responsibility and utilizing relatives as workers, greater mobility of individuals reduces the available pool of both foster parents and foster children.

10. Line EM - The more children a woman has, the less likely it is that she can afford

to send all of them to school. It is a common practice among the Akan to make an older child, more often a sister, take responsibility for one or more of her younger siblings. This may come at the same time as when she is raising her own children.

11. ET - Education can lead people to question tradition. There is a high correlation between education and non-compliance with tradition. People would say "now that we know better, we no longer believe this" or "with education, all things are possible".

12. Line EG - There is a strong bias in favour of spending more money on education for boys. The tendency is against "wasting" formal education on girls who may well get pregnant before they finish middle school. Akuoko (pers. com., 1996) suggested that the father in the article which prompted this research, was teaching his daughters to weave so that they could help send their brothers to school. The daughters would receive very little, if any, formal schooling. The father would be reluctant to admit this since the government of Ghana is making a concerted effort to raise the literacy standards of all its citizens, but especially of the girls.

13. Line MT - Traditional marriage is still the most common type of union. However, divorce is also common. Polygamy is beginning to look more like serial monogamy; a first wife may, more often than not, divorce the husband when he decides to marry again. Women favour ordinance (or Christian) marriage over the traditional, while most men are in favour of traditional marriage. I think that one of the reasons young women are overwhelmingly Christian is because Christianity opposes polygamy. Tradition is also affected when men abandon their families or women forgo marriage and have children anyway.

14. Line MG - In the past, the Asante had fairly rigid expectations of how a husband and wife behaved toward each other. Even though the kinship system is matrilineal, the Asante are patriarchal. A men was the "boss" of his wives. He could (and some men still can) control the actions of the wife. Now men complain that their wives no longer respect (obey) them. If women are not financially dependent on their husbands, they do not behave like traditional wives.

15. Line TG - Tradition dictates a strong division between what is considered women's work and what is considered men's work. It was not until people questioned tradition that women also questioned gender role. One factor I investigated is the influence

of women's groups, particularly the NCWD and the Women's Forum from CEDEP. They were responsible for women taking up an activity (bead-making) that had hitherto been dominated by men, and in the process breaking new ground in bead-making designs. Women's groups in Ghana have had some success in gaining entry for women to what was traditionally men's work.

In my discussions with Asante men and women it became quite clear that they believe there is a trend in Ghana for relations between genders becoming more strained. Women believe that it is largely due to the propensity of men to abdicate their responsibilities toward their conjugal kin. Men believe that it is due to women's increasing independence with its resulting disrespect towards their husbands and the desire for a modernizing lifestyle. Rising inflation and unemployment make it difficult for both parents to fulfill their obligations to each other, to their children, as well as to their matrikin. Allocating scarce resources according to traditional obligations may, in fact, be creating more stress on gender relations, at least between spouses. This puts more responsibility on the mothers.

The changes in the matrilineal system, with the breakdown of the traditional support systems through travelling, and the increasing reliance on urban wage employment, in conjunction with Ghana's ongoing economic problems, is responsible for village women having to find new income generating employment.. In my review of the relevant literature, I have identified a number of factors which are involved in the current situation. One of the main factors I investigated is gender as it relates to education, economics, and child care.

Development programs increasingly have been focussing on women's access to education, finances, and technology to facilitate their abilities to become involved in income-generating employment. However, there are many factors that affect the success of programs: role compatibility, gender relations, and access to capital and technology, both while girls are young and during their child rearing years. Since child rearing years in Ghana are often extended well into menopause when they may raise their grandchildren and their siblings' grandchildren, women need access to long term employment.

Due to the economic conditions in Ghana, marital relations could become even more difficult. It is likely that women will have less support from the fathers of their children. Many educated young men in the city want to leave Ghana. Village young men want to leave for the city. I saw few men in their 30's in Bonwire except on Sundays. While weaving is the preferred occupation when in Bonwire, it is also the only occupation if you want to stay there. Choices are limited. There were also few women in the 30's age group in the village while there were many children. Men in their 40's and 50's were the fathers of young children.

Older weavers generally state that weaving and some small farm income as well as the produce from the farm can support a family. While younger men also say that weaving will support a family, they expect it to be augmented by both the farm and the woman having another job. I suspect that the young men are well aware of how much different their lives are than their fathers' lives. They know their lives are changing. The men who plan to stay in weaving will probably marry a village girl before the age of 30 and raise one or more families in Bonwire or a neighbouring village.

For the young men who hope to continue their education, marriage will likely not occur for a long time. And if they marry outside of Bonwire, the cost of raising children is considerably higher. Their wives will likely have to bring in a large amount of income. Kente weaving, while living in Bonwire, if you are well established, may be adequate. But there are obviously large deficiencies because the young men have not had enough support for adequate schooling. Further, these young men are not likely probable marital partners of the young women whom I interviewed.

The young women cannot waste their best reproductive years waiting for the men to establish themselves. They will be pressured by their matrilineage to produce new members, therefore, their best chance for being a first wife will be enhanced by their own abilities to bring in other than a farm income. Desire for some of the materialism of the cities is another motivating factor for girls to marry a more established (and thus older) man or to set up a relationship with an older, married man. By my observation, young, undereducated women generally marry or liaison with an older man, especially if they leave the village. The spouses tend to be more equal in age where both are better educated and /or come from educated families or the middle class. Additionally, if a young man does establish himself by the time he is 30 there will be few single women his age who don't already have children or a relationship as a mistress.

There are an overwhelming number of single mothers, both young and old, in the Ashanti Region. They are not all divorced or widowed; rather, the father is absent from the family. This is not a new phenomenon per se; fathers in the past did not necessarily provide all that much financial support for their own children and they did not live with their spouses. Women, in the past, relied on their own matrilineage to help raise their children. What has transpired now could properly be called a "gap" in support for women. Mothers are unable to receive much financial support from the fathers of their children or from their matrilineage. This is a transition period; democracy and capitalism have introduced the nuclear family and the concept of individualism which are diametrically opposed to tribalism and the extended lineage system. Men appear to be more favourable towards the nuclear family mode than women are. They welcome relief from the burden of the extended lineage, however; they have not fully committed to supporting the nuclear family. Educated men generally provide more support for their children; village men with more than one wife, supply the least financial support.

Women talk about the nuclear family, but are more likely to feel abandoned by their matrilineages. Only educated women have any expectation that the husband will commit to supporting his own children. However, educated women as well as uneducated women "hedge their bets" as it were. They keep one foot planted solidly in the extended family system and one tentative foot in the nuclear family. I think that this is one of the reasons men see women as grasping and greedy. In the past, it was the sister who asked for money. Now a man is asked to continue the support for his sister, while at the same time his wives are expecting support, and as is the case more often now, also his mother. When old women, who have few modern skills and no education, are too old too farm, they must rely on their sons and daughters for financial aid.

One young man I spoke to in Kumasi expressed the worry that he would be quite old before he would have children. He wanted to be rich enough so that he could "take care of the children so well that they wouldn't love their mother". He knew very well that children are socialized into "loving" or appreciating the person who provides for them, and he wanted to be the one they would love when he had children.

Men in town tend to provide more of the necessities for their children than do their rural counterparts. There is a small shift towards the nuclear family in urban areas. When a rural couple move to the urban area, the husband realises that his wife and children do not have the same level of support from their matrilineage as they would have in the village. He may also be in a better position to assist his wife with child care and expenses, if his own kinsmen are not dependent on him.

It seems, that in the past, only if the marriage produced children would the wife's matrilineage have exerted pressure on her to conform and be respectful. Now, as long as there is a chance that the husband will support his children (the children of the lineage), the wife's kin will not. The husband's matrilineage does not encourage his continued support for his own children, instead they compete with the children. What would have encouraged the man in the past, other than a good relationship with his wife, would be that the children belonged to his ntoro. If he treated them well, they would look after him in his old age and would perform the rituals after death. Now in more Christian times, a man finds it easier to ignore his children because the belief in ntoro is tied to the river gods and most people practice Christianity.

The world economic system has an impact on Ghana. Some people are no longer supporting the extended family or even their nuclear family. Everyone wants to "get ahead" for themselves. The family pools resources and sends one member to Europe or North America for education. That individual may stay, either because he has not done as well as the family expected, or he is trying to save up money to get home, and therefore does not keep the pact to assist the next family member to become educated. A parent may deprive some children of their rightful support or inheritance to send one child abroad, who in turn is to sponsor the next child. If one link fails, there is virtually no chance for subsequent siblings. I was approached many times by people who begged me to tell their relative in Canada how desperate the need is at home and how much they are depending on him. The relative was no longer answering their letters.

There are many gaps in the family. People have travelled abroad and cannot or will not send support for their younger siblings and cousins. As one middle-aged man in Kumasi told me - he had been abroad for 17 years - he worked three jobs at times to try to support himself and his nuclear family in a foreign country. He was inundated with letters from his extended matrilineage, everyone wanting him to send them money or goods. He said he worked twice as hard as he would have done in Kumasi, without any of the emotional support he would have received at home. In the long run, if he had worked that hard at home, he would now be an important man, as is, his relatives have little regard for him because they don't understand how he could not have dragged his whole family to a higher economic level.

The expectations of the rest of the family are a real burden on the member who travels. Victor, my interpreter, had a chance since my field work to travel to Holland for three months. A letter I received from a mutual acquaintance illustrates how the individual dreads to return home. Even though he did not have a work visa, and therefore had no chance of earning "big money", his family had high expectations of the riches he would bring back. They sent him letters detailing the things they were expecting him to bring. It is no wonder that many Ghanaians who travel abroad prefer to stay in menial jobs in a foreign country, rather than face the disappointment of their kin when they return.

It is clear that traditional child care practices encourage women to find employment in the informal economy, where they can mind the children while they work. While there is a resistance to women weaving, weaving appears to be an occupation that meshes well with women's other roles. So why then are women not weaving?

There is a certain level of tolerance among Asante for changes in kente weaving. The colours and patterns are always open to interpretation from the individual weavers. Innovations such as incorporating new yarns and colours were never seen as fundamental changes. Even loom experimentation was tolerated but it was not taken up for practical reasons (the new looms were too expensive) as well as the fact that there was no precedent for change; nor was there a need to change. The loom was a sacred object in the past. Although the Christians may not believe all the sacredness of the past, they do hold a certain amount of reverence for the technology which was the raison d'etre of Bonwire.

Organizational changes such as the yarn co-operatives are more problematic. Each weaver is an entrepreneur. The state yarn co-operatives bypassed other entrepreneurs, the managers. Kente selling (church) co-operatives would have the same difficulties; they would have a negative impact on the smaller volume managers. The industry tolerates little control as the good weaver is not just an entrepreneur but an artist as well. Sellers of yarns and cloth are also entrepreneurs as are managers of weavers. Resistance to the co-operatives was probably at several levels, but the main one was that weavers resisted outside control. Catering to the tourist trade is not seen as control but as individual responses to market forces by each entrepreneur. There is satisfaction at meeting the challenge successfully.

Bringing women into weaving is another story entirely. I solicited opinion on the subject of women being allowed to become weavers from everyone I interviewed in Bonwire. With the answers people gave to my question in mind, I asked myself a new question. How would women weaving be, or not be, a benefit to the individual or to the community.

The benefits of women weaving are: It would create employment for the most neglected sector, young girls and women; they would be more independent; it could act as an incentive to keep the women from leaving Bonwire; a woman with a craft skill would be more marriageable. How would weaving not be a benefit? Girls might be considered less marriageable by the local men. Most men want a "traditional" wife, not an "independent" wife. Men do not expect to fully support a wife or their children. Young men appear to view marriage as more of a partnership struck for the express purpose of raising children, rather than a husband and wife helping each other for the purpose of securing a better standard of living.

All children are taught to strive for the ideals of the Asante but girls are trained to be mothers, to care for children, to grow and prepare food. Any other work they engage in is always considered to be secondary to raising children to perpetuate the matrilineage. Boys have a longer adolescence than girls do. All children begin gainful employment when young but girls are pressured to marry much younger. Boys are increasingly more dependent on their families for support to keep them in school and will therefore extend their adolescence even more.

When a boy wants to begin to learn kente weaving, he will apprentice with his father or another relative. Coy (1989) gives one definition of apprenticeship as a means of imparting specialized knowledge to a new generation of practitioners. But it is more than that in kente weaving; it is a form of gendered enculturation, not just into a specialized craft area but it socializes the boy into the society of men. He learns his role as a craftsperson and as a member of his society. He learns the ideology.

Apprenticeship is also a form of gate-keeping - certain individuals, in this case females, were kept out, not permitted access to skills and secrets, prevented from acquiring a certain knowledge and status. Girls have a similar enculturation. They train under their mothers or other female relatives for a life of farming or marketing. Apprenticeship is a way of transmitting cultural knowledge, it helps to establish membership in the community.

I will now examine both the resistance there is to allowing women to weave, and the support there is for women in Bonwire. I would have predicted that women in all age groups would have been supportive of women weaving. This was not the case. Elderly women were adamantly opposed to women weaving.

The elderly women are afraid of their own futures. They are still active workers in their households but they do not earn an income. They become dependent on their children or grandchildren for clothing and medical treatment. Because their daughters are probably heads of their own households, the women are living either in the matrilineal home with a brother or in their own home with a son. The son's children, or the brother's children and grandchildren are in competition with her over scarce cash resources. Because these women are afraid, they may feel they have to support the traditional taboo against women weaving. In other words, they are supporting the views that what is good for their sons and grandsons is also good for them, since it is sons who are generally very loyal to the mother. The daughters will look after their own children first.

Another group opposed to women weaving were the women who were 30 or older and the mothers of young children. Their sons are beginning to learn to weave and their oldest daughters already would be of some help on the farm and in the home. These mothers support sons over daughters because they know that if they need support, their sons may be in a better position in the prime of their lives than will their daughters. A son's primary loyalty to his matrikin will last much longer than will a daughter's. As soon as she has her own children, her primary loyalty is with them. A son may never feel the same level of loyalty to his own children. Firstly, the children are not part of his own lineage, and secondly, because men may marry several times, they have more children then women do. Furthermore, men may be much older (well past the middle years) than their children, particularly after the first marriage, and their mothers may no longer be alive when they have their heaviest responsibilities.

In contrast, the daughters in their middle years have too many dependents, their own children as well as the children of their daughters or sisters. Women realize how difficult their daughters' lives will be and know that the husband can forbid them to weave. If she complies, she will have wasted valuable learning time on a craft she no longer can practice. The daughter then has to make the decision to either leave her husband and lose any kind of support for raising the children, or to comply with the husband's wishes.

The Queen Mother is worried about the future of the young women in the village, especially the future of those girls who have little chance at education. They need to learn a skill which can assure them of an adequate income. They no longer have the guarantee of the necessary support from their matrilineage nor can they expect full support from a husband. The matrilineage no longer supports women as much as it used to do and women are listening to their husbands more just in case they will get financial help.

Middle aged women are very supportive of women weaving. They are mothers of young women who are soon to enter, or already have begun, their busiest reproductive years. If these women have no skills to earn an income, they and their children become a burden on the household. Whether the daughters are married or not, they will usually be living with their mothers for a considerable period of their child bearing years. Furthermore, middle-aged women, who are at the most productive time of their lives, know what is ahead for their daughters, and would like to see them better prepared to deal with an uncertain future. This includes the fact that younger men are not taking as much responsibility for their children as society is beginning to expect from them.

Young women and girls know they will likely not be able to depend on one man to support their children (without children they cannot become adults) therefore they need to be able to work at a job that will support themselves and their children. These women were enthusiastically supportive of women weaving. Their own schooling was cut short for lack of funds, and in some cases, to give their brothers the benefit of a better education. These girls are not satisfied to be in the lowest social and economic position in the community. This position is somewhat a mirror image of the status of elderly women. The difference is that young women have potential but lack experience; old women have experience, but lack potential. Young women seek to augment their status, old women try to protect the little status they have left. Young women can therefore take more risk, and in doing so may create real change in women's status in the community. If they do not take the risks, they will be very vulnerable by the time they reach their 30's, when their families are growing and they can expect to have the least support from their husbands and from their matrilineage. They may well change their views on whether women should be allowed to weave.

Old men, with the notable exception of Nana Opanin, see the changes and understand that the technological world is here. They have become more tolerant of other viewpoints. They can no longer see their way clear to keeping all the traditions unchanged. They want to protect the weaving industry because it represents more than just cloth and apparel. The old men who support women weaving see it as a way for women to more successfully support their obligations. I was told that it is also more likely that daughters and grand daughters support their fathers and grandfathers in their old age, (sons are more loyal to their mothers) therefore it is also prudent to support them to learn a trade. Men know the amount of time it takes to learn the patterns and they are not in the least worried that women will become better weavers than men will. They themselves, and their sons, will never be in direct competition with women weavers, therefore, they can more readily support change.

The Kente Chiefs were supportive of women weaving because they too are worried about the future of kente. Many boys are "lured" away from Bonwire and kente weaving by education and the modern wage sector. Once they leave, few will return to teach weaving to their sons. Therefore, if they keep the women in Bonwire by giving them an incentive such as weaving, they ensure a steady supply of "sons of Bonwire" to become weavers. The promotion of kente, because it is the legacy of Bonwire, is more important than keeping women from the technology.

One of the young men could see that as limited as a man's choices might be, a woman's choices are even more limited. Young men can always fall back on kente weaving if they fail to get an education or fail to learn another more lucrative trade. Young women can only fall back on the highly competitive market place in Kumasi or on prostitution, trading her body to support herself.

Most young men, however, are against women weaving. They are afraid of competing with women. They fear that a wife will not "love" them enough to cook well for them, if she is able to support herself adequately. They want a wife who will be meek and obedient. According to my research, women are only meek and obedient when they are poor. That is not to say that this is the only possible "successful" type of relationship. The young men were speaking in idealistic terms. Where the wife is poor, at least from her perspective the relationship would not be a success. Most of these young men do not expect to stay weaving, and therefore, do not expect to stay in Bonwire.

The men who say they would marry a weaver are related to the young women who can weave. At least two of them expect to make weaving their vocation. They view a wife as a helpmate; together they would earn more money so they could provide better for their children. These men are not afraid of competing with women, however, they do worry a bit about the "cooking", or relationship side of the marriage.

Cooking is a more practical thing. In a relationship where husband and wife may never reside in the same house, and where marriage ties can seem quite tenuous, their strength depending on the production of offspring for both, a man's ability to support her and her children financially, cooking becomes the symbol of those ties. If she is cooking regularly for him, she is showing that she cares about the marriage and by extension cares about him. If she skimps on his food (serves "skinny" soup) she shows her displeasure with the relationship or with his ability to contribute to the household.

Married men who approve of women weaving, are not married to a weaver, and as they were probably not in a position to marry again soon, they were not contemplating marriage with a weaver. Their approval for women weaving sprang from a desire to see their daughters financially secure. Men in their 40's and 50's are generally more involved with their children. The children who are older may be living with their father, and the father may be supporting a large number of matrilineal relatives. If his teenage daughters can support themselves with weaving, his own burden lightens.

I found that young men are afraid that they will not have the same status and power their fathers had. Young women are eager for change because they are hoping for higher economic status. Because status rises as one becomes more economically secure, the fear that young men have is that relevant status between genders will change. That is, they fear that women will be too independent to respect their husbands.

This fear is really a very individual event. Men fear their own wives will not respect them. They are not really concerned if other men's wives respect their husbands. Most young men would not resist their sisters becoming weavers, and their sisters will be other men's wives. Additionally, men would allow their sisters to weave because, perhaps then he would not have as many responsibilities towards her children if she can earn enough to support them.

I think the Kentehene and many older men know that Bonwire is fortunate among villages in that they do have a craft, but they have to promote it as actively as they can. They are therefore willing to have women learn to weave. There is also a concern with women's morals. Women without a chance to earn an income may, in desperation, be attracted to prostitution. Although illegitimate children and single women are not stigmatised, known prostitutes are ostracized. It would be difficult for a prostitute to find a husband.

The reason why women don't weave can only partially be explained by analysing the resistance to women weaving. It is important to look at other difficulties that women encounter that work against women eg. traditional role, combining weaving with other work women must accomplish, fear of going against societal norms, fear of not marrying or mothering, ridicule and retribution.

When I first engaged the question of **why women don't weave**, it seemed that access to looms was the problem. Like the woman tourist who came to Bonwire, thinking that weaving should be in the hands of women, I had not yet probed deeper and so could see only the skin of the argument. When I asked the residents, I was given such a variety of answers that it seemed the problem was so multi faceted that it would be impossible to come to any real conclusions. However, with much reflection on the question, I now have a more complete understanding of it.

The first component I examined was the ritual and taboo which surrounds the loom and weaving. At one time, prior to Christianity and formal education, people believed that women could, and would, be hurt by the power in the loom. The taboo against women weaving was, however, invented by men to keep women from weaving. Because of the mythological origins of weaving, men claimed that they were justified in the taboo. Weaving was, after all, given to men. The taboo against women weaving was placed in such a way that the very fabric and identity of being female was threatened. Although some men believed the taboo that women would be struck barren, no woman did. While most people now are Christian and do not actively believe the taboo, residual belief in witchcraft or jujus (bad medicine) remains. Women cannot afford to act in a way that could cause enmity or bring social ostracism lest they become the target of their enemies.

The next component is time and training. Weaving has a relatively long training period before a weaver can become proficient enough to earn an adequate income. It is not like bead-making where, after you learn the basics, you need only become faster. In weaving you must practice and learn enough patterns so that people will respect your knowledge and skill; they can then trust you with their commissions.

Few girls are given the chance to spend as much uninterrupted time at the loom as boys are. Girls have other chores, while learning to weave is the primary chore of a "son of Bonwire". Even Salomey, whose father taught her how to weave is not as fast as her brothers. That is because she cannot devote the same amount of time to learning.

The Master Weaver, who is at the height of his weaving skills has been weaving for almost 50 years. He spends between 66 and 77 hours a week weaving. No woman would find that much time to devote to weaving. Time is different for girls than for boys in Bonwire. When a boy returns from school, his chore is learning to weave. When a girl returns from school she has a lot of chores to do before she could even begin to sit at the loom.

It would help girls to learn weaving earlier as well. If they had the support of their mothers they could free up the time to learn weaving. However, women often need the labour of their daughters, and therefore do not encourage them to take up something as time-consuming as weaving. Without the time input, girls cannot develop the skill to a level where it becomes profitable.

Although the narrow-strip loom is a relatively inexpensive technology, the loom parts still represent a major purchase for a weaver. Men talk about the years they worked for their fathers before they were in a position to own their own looms. The loom structure is constructed from milled wood which is purchased in Kumasi. The other loom parts such as the reeds, shuttles, and heddles are made by specialized crafts people. The total cost involved is approximately $150.00 Can., which represents years of saving. The profits from the kente which apprentices weave are very small and often do not cover the boy's food costs. The father saves any money above the food costs to invest in a loom for the son.

Girls have no way of earning the money to purchase a loom. If they had the type of employment where they could save that much money, they would continue that work rather than invest everything in a loom. Furthermore, the yarns for a cloth are expensive, so that even when someone lets her use his loom, she needs to invest in the yarns.

Even if a girl becomes a fairly competent weaver, once she marries she is subject to her husband's dictates, and may have to stop weaving. Even when he allows her to continue weaving there are major problems when she has children. It is quite obvious that in the latter stages of pregnancy, weaving could be difficult if not impossible. Furthermore, babies and small children require a fair amount of attention. If she had no one to mind the children, she could only weave when they were asleep. I watched as Salomey demonstrated her weaving ability for me. Her two year old daughter kept trying to climb into her lap, even though several relatives tried to distract the child. A number of people whom I interviewed mentioned that weaving would be suitable for women before they had children and after the children were older. A long hiatus from weaving, unfortunately impedes the growth of her weaving skills.

This brings us to an even more important reason why it is difficult, but not impossible for women to weave. Women have the greater burden of financial care for their children. If a woman spent her time weaving, she would not be able to farm, and therefore would need more money to purchase food. Women also need a faster turnover on their investment. Depending on the design of the cloth and the skill of the weaver, it may take four months to complete one cloth. Women with small children cannot afford to wait that long for a return on their investments. A number of women mentioned that women go into marketing for the simple reason that they can have quick returns on investments. Older, more established women become managers when they can afford long term investments. Managers purchase yarns and commission weavers who cannot afford the yarns.

Having given the forgoing reasons why women don't weave, I will now give reasons why they have tried to become weavers. Girls have the lowest social position; they are at the bottom of the pecking order. People who are at the bottom of the economic strata take more risks. They feel that they have less to lose, and therefore, they take a chance on gaining something. The girls were excited about having a chance to weave and earn income when they were encouraged by outsiders. All they invested in the projects was time and labour. They also felt a sense of destiny; they were pioneers.

CEDEP Women's Forum is preparing to teach an additional 90 girls how to weave this year. They will not lack for candidates. The question is, how many will actually become long term weavers. One young mother whom I interviewed told me that she did not approve of women weaving and would not allow her daughter to weave. However, later, when she erroneously thought that I might be planning to start a weaving project for women, she was willing to have her daughter participate. She felt that she could not stand in the way of her daughter if there was some chance for economic success.

Economic success would also entail having a ready market for the kente. Local demand for kente is high, however, few people can afford the expensive cloths. But with the Ghanaian government promoting Bonwire as a tourist destination, the market for kente could expand. Even now it is becoming more popular with African Americans, who use it for headties and graduation shawls.

The two women weavers whom I interviewed, Salomey and Adwoa, were interested in the craft before they were interested in the money. There will always be some women who are interested enough to challenge the boundaries. Additionally, there are always some girls who look at the unfairness of things and try to change social boundaries. Furthermore, because the impetus (for change) has come from outside, it somewhat ameliorates the sanctions against involvement. While girls may be submissive in their behaviour to men and to their elders, they are not passive. They use strategies to gain weaving knowledge by watching their brothers and using the looms when they can. When they earn money, they control their own income,

The matrilineal kinship system appears to have some influence on whether or not women risk social censure. When Adwoa demonstrated her weaving skills, she did so in a room full of men. I would guess that this was a singular event and had not happened before. Some of the men were quite shocked at her boldness, and most objected strenuously. She had the courage to defy convention because she had a lot of woman centred support. If she had been living with a father figure (her father was no longer alive) or husband she probably would not have dared it. Men would have put pressure on him (through joking or ridicule) to control the woman. Because she lives in a woman headed household, she is not as vulnerable to male disapproval at home. Asante women are strong and independent minded. Men say they are stubborn, but I think this strength does come, in part, from the importance that the matrilineage places on women's productive and reproductive value. Even though their social and economic status is lower than men's status, women are held in high regard because they are responsible for bearing and nurturing the next generation for their own matrilineage.

In summation, women would now weave when and if it suited their particular circumstances to do so. However, given present circumstances, most would need financial support to invest their time in learning to weave. If the Bonwire Kente Project could be sustained over several years, a few women might become full time, long term weavers. I do not think that in the short term the project will bring village women much relief from economic uncertainty. It could have a greater economic benefit over the long term.

The resistance to women weaving may grow stronger in the short term as well. The young men and boys are worried not only that their wives will not respect them, but also that women may steal their legacy, the "gift" of weaving. They may use tactics such as ridicule to frighten the younger girls away from weaving. But because of the support the Bonwire Kente Project has from the Kentehene, the other chiefs and the Queen Mother, the resistance may become token in the long term.

A number of villagers pointed out that the "problem" of women being allowed to weave is one that the youth will contend with. Older people who are against women weaving will have little real impact on the near and distant future. There are also young men who are in favour of women weaving who may act as good role models.

If the Ghanaian economy improves to the point where girls can expect to receive a higher education, the problem may well be redundant. Given the West African system of gender division in labour, it is not likely in the near future that we will see women and men weave side-by-side. Those few young people, perhaps women as well as men, who see weaving as their vocation will still be weavers no matter how much the economy improves.

One of the reasons, other than cultural, for the renaissance in kente weaving is that the economy is forcing boys to learn to weave because they have no other employment. Tourism promotion may have a further impact on demand, and thereby may increase the financial return on weaving, which would lead to more boys choosing a vocation in weaving.

IF I WERE TO RESEARCH FURTHER

I would go back to Bonwire in a few years to see what changes have occurred in kente weaving since my fieldwork. How did the Bonwire Anglican Weaving Project turn out? Are those women who learned to weave making an adequate living at it? Do the young men still believe that women should not weave?

I would look at whether gender changes are happening in other traditional roles in Ghana and elsewhere in West Africa.

I would examine how, and under what circumstances, the Akan matrilineal system incorporates gender role change in response to outside pressure. To understand the reasons why development projects succeed or fail, I would examine at least two other matrilineal culture systems, which are facing similar pressures, for comparison.

I would investigate whether capitalism[38] is the most appropriate ideology on which to base the Ghanaian economic system. It is my contention that the capitalist economy is not compatible with the extended lineage system (regardless of what the kinship system is) and works to undermine traditional family relationships.

I would investigate the impact conversion to patriarchal religions, like Christianity and Islam, has on the matrilineal kinship system. More specifically, I would like to know, what if any, the effect is on the relationship between Asante fathers and their children.

I would explore the implications of exchanging one religious system with another, look at which beliefs are discarded, which are transformed, and which are incorporated to better understand what it means when one's religion is no longer relevant to one's circumstances.

I would listen to the women of Bonwire when they talk about their life stories, about how they cope with the many changes which are occurring in Asante society. I would gather and write the life histories of some of these women.

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[38] That is, capitalism is "characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision rather than by state control, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market" (Mish, 1983, p. 204).

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